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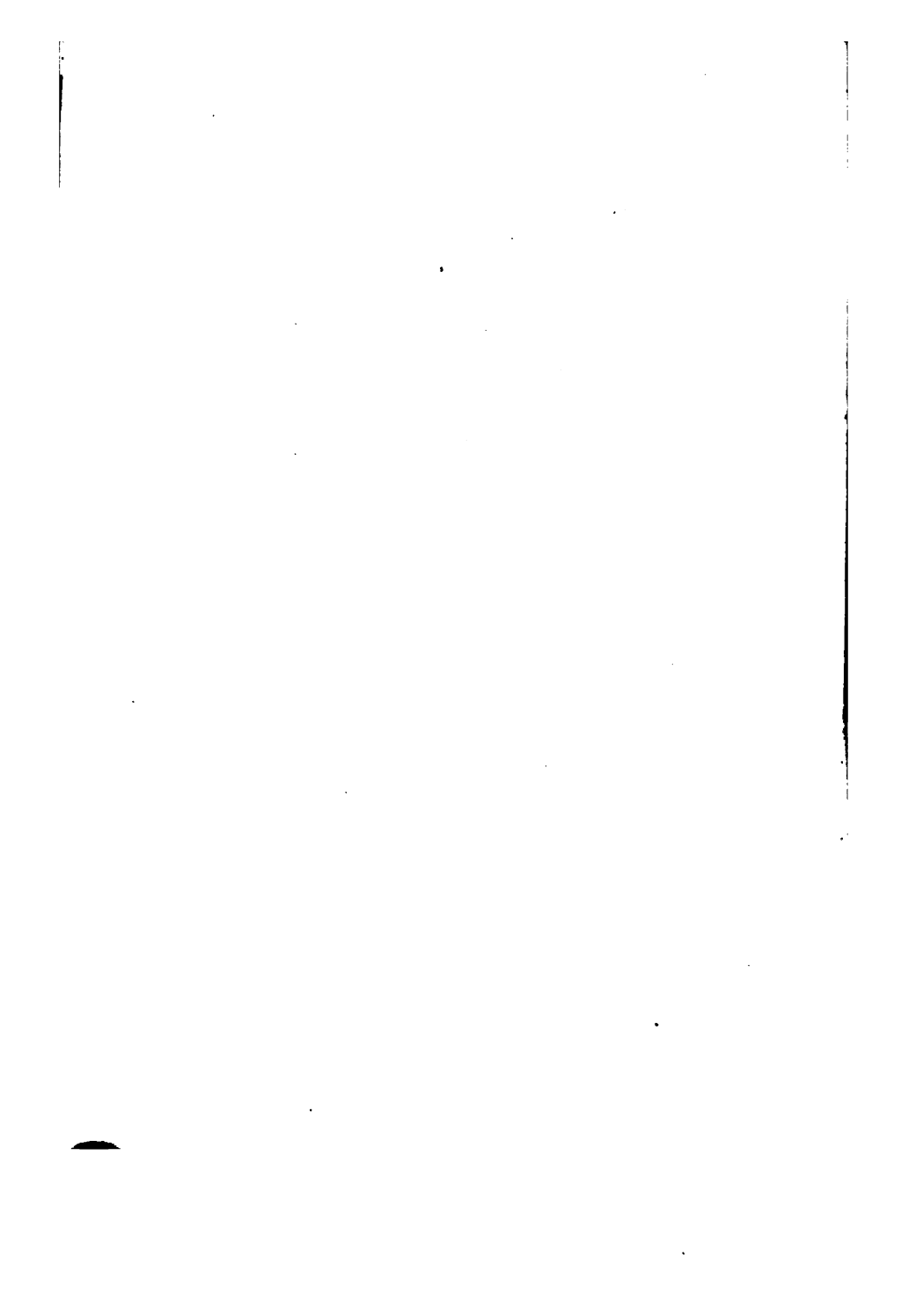
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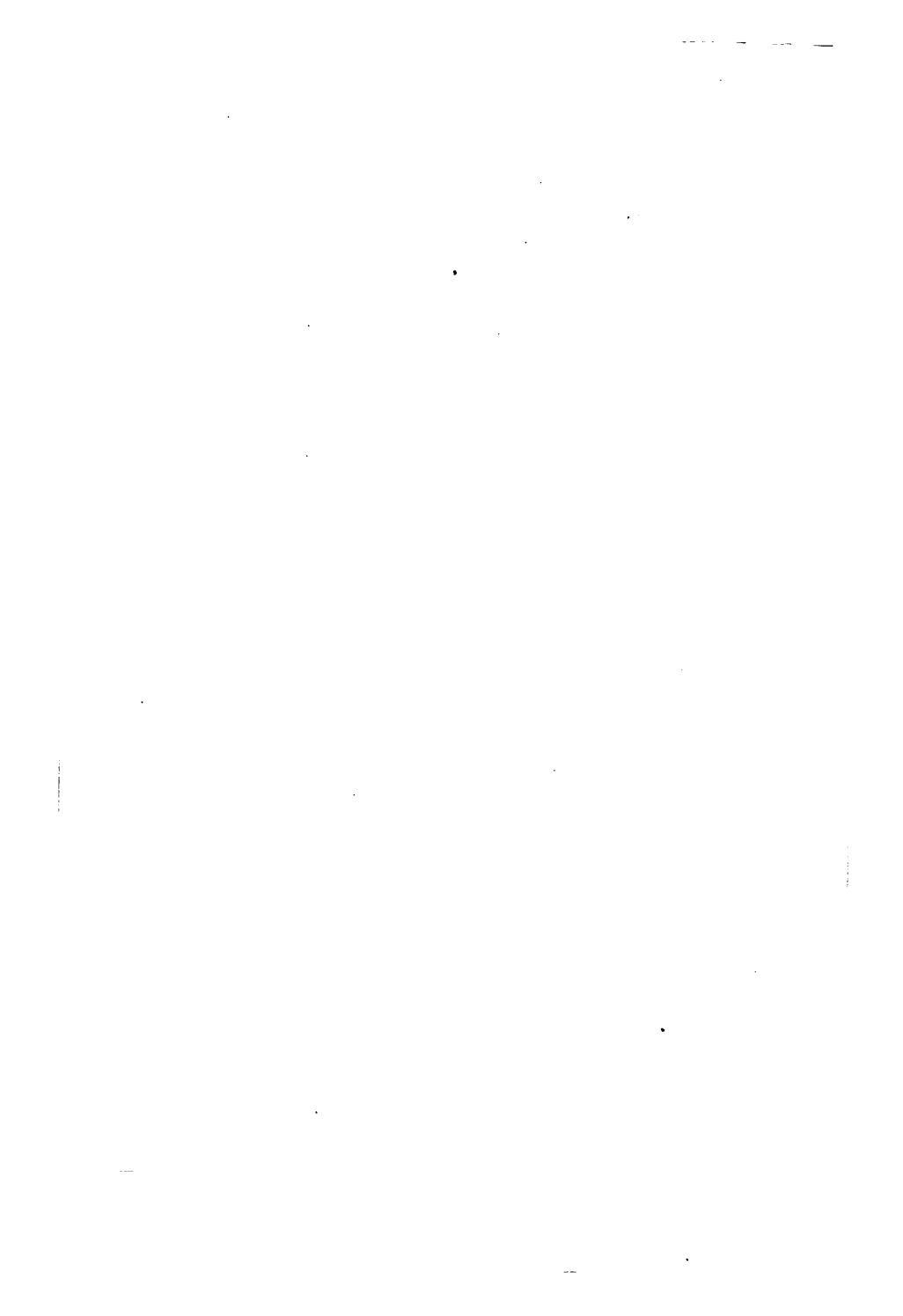
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AN AVERAGE MAN

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JASON EDWARDS.

PART FIRST—THE MECHANIC.

I.

THERE was a phrase which very completely defined the character of Walter Reeves. He was level-headed. He faced the street, hideous with mud, and tumultuous with the war of belated business, with a laughing face and steady brown eyes, though the city impressed him more than he expected it to do. Fresh from college in an interior New England town, where life moved quietly—this rush of men and teams over greasy, black cobble-stones deafened and bewildered him.

He stood a little while in the mouth of the depot, a gloomy, castellated structure.

His first thought was how to get a boarding place. He set off at last, breasting the stream of suburban people making toward the trains. He was conscious of a little feeling of pride in his appearance, and was flattered by the pleasant glances the young girls gave him as they passed in their beautiful blue and wine-colored waterproof cloaks.

The boarding-house problem puzzled him. Like the thrifty New England boy he was, he couldn't think of going to a hotel, so he fell into the slender stream of people moving off into the heart of the city. This brought him inevitably to the Common, which he had visited once on a Fourth of July excursion.

It was growing dark now, and the rain was falling steadily. The November wind had a wild and lonesome sound in the branches over his head—but he only heard that when the heavy gusts came. The ceaseless tramp of hooves and the grinding roar of the cars deafened and clouded his brain.

He kept on down the plank walk till

he came to the end of the Common. He paused and considered. A fat, very red-haired policeman was standing in the middle of the intersecting streets directing the streams of impatient drivers and sheltering timid ladies across the way under his chevroned arm.

Walter had always been told that the only safe person to ask a question of on the street was a policeman, so he stood an instant by the side of the gesticulating giant, and asked for a good, cheap boarding-house.

"F'r Gawd's sake!" growled the stupefied officer, looking down into Reeves' face. "Where you born?—H'yar! What 're y' doin' there? G'wan!" he shouted to a hackman who was cutting in ahead of a car. He then remembered Reeves. "Anywhere. De whole town is full of 'um"—he threw out his arm toward the left—"Git a move on ye there!"

Walter crossed the street and moved in the direction indicated by the policeman. It was a noisy and crowded street, and he turned off instinctively upon one of the

side streets. Cards saying "Rooms" were in the basement windows here and there, and occasionally "Board and Rooms". He rang the bell of one of the latter places and a tall and handsome woman came to the door.

"I'd like to get board here," he said, looking up at her. She studied him as was her need. She liked him.

"Very well. Won't you come in?" She prided herself on being a judge of faces.

He set as the limit of his board bill five dollars per week, and was delighted when he found he could get board and room for four dollars and seventy-five cents. He set his valise down on the floor after the landlady had gone, and surveyed his "Hall room, one flight". It was exactly six feet by twelve, the little cot-bed occupied half the width, and a little table and washstand filled in the chinks. However, it was all new and strange and delightful. It had some of the effect of camping in the woods.

He lay down on the bed and planned his campaign. He had always looked for-

ward to doing newspaper work, and he had long had his eyes fixed on the *Events*, as the paper he would like best to be connected with. He determined to call upon the editor of the *Events* first. He had a note of introduction. It was from his teacher, who had spent a couple of weeks with the editor at a Summer hotel.

He found him with head immersed in a roll-top desk like an ox in a manger of hay. He was a kindly man naturally, but he was worn and pre-occupied.

"Sit down—si' down!" he said, but as the only chair beside his was piled with papers, Walter remained standing.

The editor read the note in a flash, and took his pen down from behind his ear and began correcting manuscript as he replied—

"Glad to see you, Mr. Reeves. You might see our Mr. Daggett—I'm afraid it won't do any good—but something's turning up almost every day, and"—he forgot to finish, and Reeves went out.

He stood out in the counting-room a long time and looked up along the line of clerks.

"Where'll I find Mr. Daggett?"

"First window right," said the youth without looking up. He had the tone of a clerk who had little to do and didn't care to do that.

"I'd like to see Mr. Daggett," Reeves asked at the next window.

"Four flights," was the reply of clerk No. 2 in the same tone.

Walter was getting angry. He climbed the four flights and came into a long room with a row of stalls on the right-hand side, a window to each stall. A tall old man with his hands full of strips of printed matter was coming out of the second stall.

"I'd like to see Mr. Daggett."

"Right here, sir."

A grizzled man with a very ragged coat and a shade over his eyes looked up. His very glance was a staccato question.

Walter made his request.

"Got mor'n we can use now. I wish Miller'd stop this thing. There's no place for you here."

"Exactly," said Walter, who was just nettled enough to be on his dignity. "Knew

you'd say just that. Now I want you to look at me hard—so you'll know me again."

Daggett looked at him in astonishment, his grey eyes getting big and round.

"What the devil do I care how you look?"

"Because I may be sitting in your place before five years are up. Here's my card. I'm green, but I ain't a salad."

Daggett laughed. "Well, young man, you've got cheek, if nothing more. Go ahead, let's see what you can do.

Thus dismissed, Reeves went down the long stairs a little hot, but with the determination to fulfill his word now, at any cost. He was not entirely unfamiliar with the needs of a newspaper, and so as he sat in his little hall bedroom that night, he laid out his plan.

"The first thing a reporter wants to do is to know the town. I'll simply get this whole city mapped out in my head like a cabbage field. The reporter's business is to get the news—and what the paper wants is the news, and news they'll have. I'll

send in something every day, or break my neck tryin', that's all. They won't pay for it, but that's nothing—they will one o' these days."

So he set to work to ransack the city. He first studied the streets. A hack driver gave him a clue to the labyrinth.

"Now here's Washington Street—see? Well, dat's de backbone o' de hull blame town—see? An' *Tre-mont* is jist like it. Now w'en you start out to look f'r anny place, jist figger out whedder it's on de hind-leg 'r de shoulder—see?"

Reeves saw. This luminous description of Boston's anatomy was worth more as a starter than any map. He soon knew every principal street. Next he studied the districts of the city. He found that the West End held most colored people, the North End most Italians, the South End most Irish, Harrison Avenue most Chinese. He studied the wharves till the longshoremen wondered at him. He discovered a great deal about sailors, one thing being that they never talked in nautical metaphors.

He dressed in plain, thick gray clothes, suitable for any place or any weather, and looked like a grocer's collection man—all save his pleasant face and peculiar, keen laughing eyes. He went everywhere and saw everything from "London Bridge" to the Symphony Circuit.

Everybody liked him. The policemen in certain quarters grew to nod and grin as he passed along. He told everybody frankly that he was going for the *Events*, was after a position.

One day he looked in on Daggett and said—

"Hello! Used my little 'story' of the row up in Italy, didn't yeh? I'll send in my bill one o' these days."

Daggett gave him one brief glance. "You'll own the paper yet."

"I certainly will."

"You certainly will if cheek counts," growled the editor. He put his head out of the stall, twenty minutes later, and moralized for the benefit of the other stalls.

"Damned if it ain't pathetic to see a

bright young fellah come down here like that to conquer the city. We all did it—and failed—most of us. And he'll fail. He's a bright fellow, but nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand, fail. If youth only knew what was before it, it would commit suicide, or words to that effect. But it don't. It plunges along, down every night, up every morning—I swear it's tragic."

There was a dead silence. Then a voice said, "Say, Daggett, moralize after two o'clock, won't you?"

As a matter of fact, before the winter was over Walter was put on the list at a small salary.

"Just for your cursed impudence," Daggett said with a grin.

"All right," chirped Reeves—"the same kind of steam has got to bring me twenty dollars—see?" He ended with the inflection of the street.

"Devilish clever lad," said Daggett to the military editor. "They tell me he knows the city like his primer. I'll keep an eye on him. The 'old man' must

know of the young fellow. He'll make his mark, if he don't get to living too fast."

"No danger o' that."

"Why so?"

"He don't drink n'r smoke."

"Phew! You don't mean it! By jinks, he's a sort of—phenomenon. Does he write well?"

"M—tolerably. A little inclined to soar—you understand—'silver-lining'—'along our pathway' and the like o' that—but nothing organic, so to say. He can be cured."

"We'll use that young felleh," said Daggett.

And use him they did. They unloaded all sorts of jobs upon him, but he said nothing, for it was opportunity to show what was in him that he wanted most of all. He did twenty-dollar jobs for ten, and did his best. He asked to be assigned to different work. Now to the lectures and theatres, now to the private musical-educational, and he did some political interviewing—in short, he worked and studied

to round himself, to give himself thorough information in the city's life.

He made friends and kept them, and made mainly good ones, for the men who might have been harmful to a weaker man were of use to him. He studied them closely as facts. He soon knew young men of good families, and he began to go out a good deal at the end of a couple of years. As his salary increased he lived better in proportion, surrounding himself with books and pictures.

His room became the meeting place for the more ambitious young newspaper fellows, and Daggett came around once in a while to growl away in a monotone, in his interesting way. The young fellows thought it quite an honor.

Life went on amazingly well for him. At the end of his fifth year in Boston, he was the "Dramatic Editor" on the *Events* at a good salary. He was a man of large acquaintance, and a universal belief in his future was expressed by Daggett, "He's a born newspaper man. If nothing happens to him, he'll get too big for Boston."

"What do you think may happen to him?"

"Settle down into a daily grind like you and I," said Daggett with an unusual depth of feeling in his voice. Already he began to humble himself in the face of triumphant youth.

II.

ONE April day in his fifth year in Boston he had been in the public library studying up for a special article in a magazine, and stood at the door looking out at the people streaming by. The pent-up river of traffic in Boylston street ground and thundered by him unnoticed. He was thinking of his mountain birth-place—the unusual blue of the sky brought it all back to him. He felt tired and worn with the city, and was planning a long vacation home—when a girl passed!

Thousands had passed him, myriads of smiling girls and splendid women—but the mysterious had happened. The great, wistful eyes, the pre-occupied, unseeing expression of the girl's face, and the grace of her step, stopped him as if an invisible hand had been placed upon his heart. He

marvelled at this astounding psychological effect, even while his breath quickened. With a feeling almost of pain, he stood irresolute, and watched her disappear among the unimpersonal thousands of the street.

“If I were a mediæval Romeo instead of a jaded critic of stage Romeos I’d spring to that woman’s side and ask her name and residence.” Ten minutes before he wouldn’t have owned that any face in the world could have moved him so. For a month he carried that picture in his mind. He pondered on it. She was poor, that was evident. She wore no gloves, and her dress was very simple. His reportorial eye had noted every detail. Her hat was graceful, but cheap, and she had a roll of music, probably she was a teacher of music somewhere in the city. He haunted the library at that same hour day after day till he grew ashamed and furtive in action, all to no purpose. But as the weeks wore on the sense of personal loss grew less keen, and was felt only when he sat in his room at night, writing or dreaming at his desk.

He was thinking of that face one evening in June, when Jerome Austin, an artist friend, came into his room, in his impetuous way and sprawled out like a lobster on the couch.

"What's on with you to-night, old man?"

"Well, I'd looked forward to a rather quiet time of it."

"Oh, bother! Come out with me. I've a friend (one of the penalties of having friends), a girl graduate at the Conservatory, who's going to display her voice and gown to-night. There'll be pretty girls till you can't rest, and they'll elocute and cutely yell" —

"Oh, horrible!" groaned Reeves.

"I know! It's the state I'm in. If you come, I'll introduce you to a lot of girls delicious as peaches and cream."

Austin was always a study to Reeves, and never more so than that night. As they sat to watch the exercises of the evening, he bubbled over with an innocent sort of ribaldry.

The beautiful little hall was like a huge bouquet of flowers, especially the gallery,

where the seats were entirely filled with the girls of the Conservatory — girls with brown eyes, girls with blue eyes, girls with hair cut short and curling gracefully around their heads, girls with bushy hair (very masculine and strong), girls of all sorts, save dull girls. These ambitious little creatures, with their hopes and fears, made the more thoughtful Reeves ponder deeply. So bright, so eager, so resolute, what will life be to them ten years hence? Happy, they think. Full of increasing care, Reeves knew. But Austin kept on irrepressibly, a sort of chorus through the performance.

“Now you’ll hear some dear little creature—no, we have a whole row—ah! I see! A fan drill. Very good! Arms and necks and heads and pretty white-slipped toes—that one on the right is my friend. She mustn’t see me. She’d laugh. Now see our heads wag! Now we’ll display our wrists. Ta-ta, tum-tum. See the one on the left—ain’t she a daisy?”

Reeves was looking at the audience,

when Austin said, "Ah! Now we'll have a song!" And he turned just in time to see a girl slip from the wing and bow to the audience. It was his wild bird of the street! Her flushed face and eager eyes, her slender figure, dressed in white or pink, was glorified with a sort of woman's pride mixed with an anticipation of triumph, as if she felt in advance the applause which really burst forth when she had finished her simple little song, "Errinnerung," by Brahms.

Austin commented self-containedly:

"Voice fair. Good feeling—but what eyes? Did you notice those eye-lashes? They'd make a fortune for an actress. Eh?"

"A very pretty girl," said Reeves, taking refuge in a conventional tone and phrase.

"Pretty! Say, I thought you had some judgment. That girl's spicy as a June meadow. Hang it, man! I wouldn't be a reporter for money. There's character in her face. How I'd like to paint her? I must get an introduction."

"Take me along, too?" asked Reeves indifferently—he congratulated himself.

"Oh, yes, certainly—that is—I'm sorry to be obliged to. That moustache of yours is such a killing curl, and mine bristles like a nail-brush. I must paste it down some way."

And it was in this way that Reeves met her. She was standing in the midst of a bevy of girls, her eyes already far off, a faint smile on her lips.

"Allie, dear, let me present my friend, Mr. Austin, and his friend, Mr. Reeves. Miss Edwards, Mr. Reeves is a horrid editor, and we must treat him well, or he'll pounce on us. I'll bribe him with a rose," she said, detaching one from her bouquet.

"I have nothing but praise to say of your work, Miss Edwards," Reeves said a few moments later as Miss Caswell turned away with Austin. "You are nearly done here, I take it."

"Oh, no. I'm only half-way. I graduate next year, but I hope to take a post-graduate course."

"You're ambitious to sing on the platform, I suppose?"

"Yes, I must earn money, and there is more money to be made that way."

"You are very frank to say you're to sing for money. It's common to say, 'I love art for art's sake'."

"That is very well for those who have little need of money, but I must earn money. I need it, and my parents need it. Do you think I can succeed?" she asked eagerly.

"I do, indeed."

A little girl of eight or thereabouts, pulled at her dress, looking shyly at Reeves.

"Allie, papa's waitin'."

"I must go now. I'm very grateful for your kind encouragement."

"I am always glad to speak such words when I can do so honestly, as I can in your case. Won't you please let me know when you are to sing again? I want to hear you—and, pardon me, may I call to see you? I may be able to advise you."

"You are very kind, Mr. Reeves," she

replied with a shadow on her face. "I fear our home is too poor—my father is a mechanic."

"Mine was a farmer," he said with a smile. "We haven't got quite to the point of despising honest labor."

"We live at 700 Pleasant Avenue. Father will be pleased to know you."

Reeves chafed at the formal words and tones he was forced to use while looking down into that sensitive face and those clear eyes. He followed them out into the hall, and saw them greet a middle-aged man with short, grey beard, who did not smile as he met his daughter, and did not speak of her singing.

Jason Edwards had that peculiar reserve upon all points of tenderness and affection so characteristic of the New Englander. He merely said, "Who was the man that came out behind you, Allie—the one with the brown moustache? I've seen him before."

"His name is Reeves, father. He liked my song very much."

"Well, I should think he might."

"Didn't she look lovely, poppa?"

"Sh—don't talk so loud, Linnie. People will hear you."

"I don't care—she was just lovely."

Alice was thinking of that eager look in Reeve's eyes, of the little vibrant undertone in his voice, as he asked permission to call. She was almost frightened at the idea. This editor of a great paper—for she had no very clear idea of an editor—so big and handsome—Was he handsome? "Yes, he was handsome," she decided. His clear brown eyes and his brown moustache, his brown hair brushed up from his face, and his fair complexion, rose before her as something fine, honest and manly.

She turned to her father. He had taken her by the wrist with his poor calloused hands, cracked and knotted, and grimed with a half-century's toil.

"Oh, father, if my voice could only give you rest from your work!"

In that cry was her life and aim and resolution. If Reeves could have heard it, it would have added another distracting train of thought to those which kept him awake

till twelve o'clock that night in his rooms on Columbus Avenue.

Often before he had been attracted by women, had even felt moved to win them, but on nearer approach had found them only good friends at best. Would this girl continue to grow in interest? "If she does to any considerable extent," he said to himself, "I'm of no particular value to myself without her."

"But to think of that beautiful, resolute, pure soul, full of music and exaltation, living on Pleasant Avenue," and while puzzling upon this, and planning just what to say to her when he should call, he fell asleep.

Life was not the same to him when he woke the next morning. He leaped out of bed half an hour earlier to do some special work, and as he moved about, he sang so merrily that the lodger above pounded warningly on the floor with his shoe-heel.

III.

IT was about five o'clock of a stifling hot day on Pleasant Avenue. Ironically bitter, the name of the street seemed now, like many another old-time name in Boston.

The sun had gone out of it, but the heat still pulsed from the pavements and breathed from the doors and open windows of the four-story brick and wooden buildings, rising like solid walls on each side of the stream of human life which filled the crevasse with its slow motion.

Children, ragged, dirty, half-naked and ferocious, swarmed up and down the furnace-like street, swore and screamed in high-pitched, unnatural, animal-like voices, from which all childish music was lost. Frowzy women walking with a gait of utter weariness, aged women, bent and

withered, and young women soon to bring other mouths and tongues and hands into this frightful struggle, straggled along the side-walks, laden with parcels, pitifully small, filled with food.

Other women and old people leaned from the open windows to get a breath of cooler air, frowns of pain on their faces, while in narrow rooms foul and crowded, invalids tortured by the deafening screams of the children, and the thunder of passing teams and cars, and unable to reach the window to escape the suffocating heat and smell of the cooking, turned to the wall, dumbly praying for death to end their suffering.

If a young soul from the quiet of suburban life, or a visitor from the country, had found himself in the midst of these streets and these people, he would have trembled with fear and horror. It would have seemed to him like a hideous dream of hell, but the postman, making his last round, whistled as he threaded his way amidst the obstructions of the pavements—whistled and swore good-naturedly, as

the eager children crowded upon him. He walked briskly and with alert and pleasant eyes, his bag on his left shoulder, his left hand filled with badly written letters.

Through this street, moving toward its better quarters, Alice Edwards and Reeves were making their way slowly, oppressed by the heat and impeded by the riotous play of the children and the grimy babes rolling on the pavements before the doors.

They both moved forward with an air which plainly showed they were, like the postman, accustomed to see this. They saw it but saw it as one of the inevitable conditions. The children knew them, and many spoke to them familiarly, but not saucily.

"Hello, Mr. Reeves!"

"Hello, Alice!"

"That your sweetheart?"

"You dry up! He'll put you into the paper," said a woman with the usual shawl thrown over her head, in spite of the heat (a relic of barbarism in dress).

Alice was dressed in white, such as she usually wore when singing, and she looked

like a lost wild dove dropped into this horrible crevasse; and in her eyes there was a look of sorrowful wisdom which showed she was not unacquainted with vice and misery, though untainted by it.

They walked in silence mainly, save as they greeted the people they met. Reeves looked, as usual, shrewd and kindly, but under his drooping moustache there was the line of his lips to tell how much he felt the pity of all this degradation. He was a stalwart figure, and set off well the slender woman beside him. He was dressed, as usual, with uncommon care, wearing the conventional Prince Albert coat, but relieving himself a little of the discomfort by leaving it unbuttoned.

"This dodging the babes on the pavement makes me think of walking in the country after a rain-storm, when the toads are thick. In the thousands of the city, these little mites of humanity have no more significance than toads. They lie here, squat in the way uncared for, and unlovely. What a childhood to look back upon."

They turned in at last at one of the cave-like apertures opening upon the narrow walk, and passed into a hall which led straight through to the foul-smelling yard and alley behind.

There were two families on each floor, and as the doors were open, the smells of cooking food were mingled into an indescribable hot stench—boiled beef, onions, cabbage, fried pork and the smell of vile coffee. Babies were squaling, loud-voiced women, worried with their cares and bad-tempered from weariness, were scolding and slapping the children who ran in and out with a prodigious clatter, and shrieking and squalling.

Reeves and Alice looked into each other's faces with a significant glance, and mounted the stairs, dodging the children that were sliding down the banister and leaping across the landing.

"Did you ever notice how little heat affects children, Alice?" inquired Reeves, as they paused at the top stair.

"They are like salamanders. See their wonderful activity in spite of the heat."

"Please consider me a martyr to beauty," he said, as he took off his hat and flung back his coat. "I'll wear my straw hat and light suit next time, if it spoils my chances for the presidency."

Alice smiled. "I didn't ask you to wear that."

Reeves caught a grinning boy by the shoulder, as he was trying to slip past him. "See here, Patsy, did you leave that banana-skin on the stairs? I nearly broke my neck last Wednesday," he exclaimed to Alice.

The room they entered was the usual living-room of the average mechanic, except that it had a carpet and piano, as if it laid claim to the name of parlor. But the table, partly spread for supper, told that it was also the dining-room. The furniture was of very humble sort, and was a peculiar mixture of old-fashioned pieces and bargains at the shoddy furniture-rooms of the city.

The carpet on the floor was bright-colored. The curtains were very neat and clean, and the whole effect was of tasteful

economy, but not comfort. The windows of the side, the only windows, looked out upon another similar tenement, across a narrow side street, along which boomed and thundered passing teams loaded with heavy plates of iron, or with immense flapping loads of lumber. Venders of fruit were crying loudly and unmusically. It was very close and unwholesome, and Reeves drew a sigh of pain as he glanced about the room as Alice sat down on the piano stool in a meditative position.

A little girl peeped in at the door and then ran away, and Mrs. Edwards, a gray-haired woman with a tired, patient face, came to the door which led into the kitchen and closed it softly, leaving the two young people alone, while she suffered a martyrdom of heat within the small cooking room.

It was a strange place for a wooing, one would say. From the street foul odors and the boom of travel. Overhead some one was tramping heavily. In the hall the children fought and screamed, and clattered up and down the stairs. That

they could sit and talk with such surroundings was sorrowful evidence that it was habitual, and to some degree unnoticed.

Reeves also sank into a chair with a sigh, and said, "Another recital like that would lay me out in the morgue. That tall girl that punished Schumann—well, let that pass—and let's come back to the subject in hand. That's all you'll promise me, is it?" he said, in a tone that implied he had returned to an interrupted conversation.

"Yes," answered Alice gravely.

"To marry me—some time."

"Yes—ain't that enough?" A hint of a smile.

"No, it's too—indefinite. Enough—to a man who wants you and the earth! I begin to see there is a radical difference between men and women—at least, between you and me. Now just think how indefinite that is—some time! Why not put a limit and bound to it? Why not say next Fourth of July?"

She laughed, but shook her head.

"Well, say Thanksgiving—Christmas—

Ah!—now I'm getting at it! It seems now I'm going to make a tremendous sacrifice—come now, say a year from to-day."

Alice spoke slowly, with a faint smile on her lips, her eyes cast down.

"Well, I'll think of it."

"What's that?"

"I said I'd think of it."

"Alice, you can be exasperating on occasion. To think of the sermons and graduating exercises I've endured, to hear you sing! To think of the lemonade and ice-cream"—

"Walter!"

"All this haf I endured mit a patient shrug," acted Reeves, turning out his palms. "All the year, only to be told to wait another year," he groaned.

"How can you make light of it?" said Alice, severely, looking up at him.

"Light of it!" cried he in astonishment. "Do I act like a man making light of it?" He rose and paced once across the room, and said gravely, "Alice, this is absurd. Look at it from my stand-point a moment. Here I am, good salary—land—a little

railway stock—my eye on a dove of a cottage in Meadow View—Queen Anne piazza”—

“I know, but”—

“But what?”

“Why—I’m happy now”—

“Well, I ain’t.”

“That is,” she hastened to explain, “I have my music, and I have father and mother and Linnie—why can’t you be patient?”

“I am. Job ain’t a circumstance to me.”

“Let me study another year”—

“Can’t think of it!”

“I love my music. I want to do something in that. I want to earn my own living—I must help my people”—

“All I have is theirs,” said Reeves solemnly.

“No, it ain’t,” she cried firmly. “I want money, all my own—that’s what I’ve studied for, and I can’t be dependent.”

“Oh, these modern women!” groaned Reeves.

“You got your place by your own work,” she continued in the same tone,

"and I want to show how much I can do" —

"You mean how little."

"I mean how much," she repeated, with a touch of silencing indignation. "I'm proud of you because you've got where you have, by your own merit. Now let me see if I can't do for myself and my parents what" —

"Nonsense! I can do work enough for two. I don't want you to work."

"I know you don't, Walter, but" —

"But what?"

"I *want* to work. Don't you see? I'm happier in my work. Let me have my freedom another" —

"Freedom!" cried Reeves in vast astonishment. "Well, now that heads me off! As if you couldn't do as you please after marrying me."

The girl, finding herself driven to give an explanation which was impossible, changed her method of attack.

"You called me the modern woman?"

"Yes, for lack of a better characterization," he replied.

"Well," she laughed mockingly, "the modern woman doesn't marry young."

"The modern woman had better look out, or she'll get out of the habit and not marry at all," grumbled Reeves. Then changing his mode of attack, he rose and closed the door, and returning took his chair over toward her, and seated himself facing her.

"Say, Alice, do you know I'm getting old—fast? I'm getting too near thirty. See the gray hairs on my head, eh?"

Alice put out her hand and pushed her fingers up through his thick hair—a caressing movement.

"Gray! There isn't a gray hair in it—and if there was"—she hesitated.

"Out with it."

"It would be due to"—

"Dissipation, eh?"

"I didn't say that."

"No, but you meant it."

"I didn't—I meant"—

"Now don't try to switch off on Back Bay parties and five o'clock teas. It's due to the suffering incident to going to church

and to recitals to hear you sing one poor little hymn"—

"Do you good," she laughed. "You wouldn't go to church at all otherwise."

"By the way, I heard Mrs. Holway was thinking of taking you up."

"I'm not going to be taken up by any such person," said Alice. "She's a coarse, ignorant woman. She asked me to-day if Wa-agner wasn't French!"

"She's pretty dense, that's a fact. About the worst Philistines I know are the people who think all the rest of the world are Philistines."

They were silent a moment, Alice standing with her hand on his shoulder.

"But to return to the discussion," began Reeves, after a few moments.

Alice withdrew her hand and began taking off her hat.

"I won't argue any more with you. Now you sit down and keep still while I help mother."

"But I"—

Alice hummed a little tune, and then turning, asked innocently—

"What were you about saying?"

"I'll go home and write a ferocious editorial on the modern woman—attacking the whole theory"—

"Do, and I'll add another year to your probation," said Alice sweetly. "I must teach you patience, or you'll be a tyrant."

Reeves groaned in mock despair. "Oh, that I were born so late! Oh, for the soft and yielding females of romance! They did nothing but faint in their lovers' arms—but these modern women"—

Alice seated herself at the piano and touched a few chords. Mrs. Edwards opened the door softly, but seeing Reeves step to Alice's side and put his hand on her shoulder, she discreetly withdrew again to her direful hot-box.

Alice, feeling the hand of her lover, ceased to play, and looked up to see a new expression on his face.

"Lovers always enjoy telling each other what they thought and felt the first time they saw each other"—

"Well, go on," smiled the girl.

"I never could say just what I felt

when I saw you, but to-day I clipped a poem that comes as near to it as any words can.

"Oh, read it to me—do!" pleaded Alice.

"How do you know it will please you?"

"I don't."

"Yes, you do, or you wouldn't ask for it."

He stood now looking down at her, seated by the piano, her hands in her lap, her eyes upturned while Reeves read—

"She passed me on the street
And saw me not!
As some sweet singer, safe
Near its swaying nest
Beside some half-hid stream
Far in the wooded west,
With pure, untroubled, child-like eyes,
She walked in happy dream,
Of her own wonder and surprise.

"Knowing not vice nor hunger's ways;
In girlhood's pure and wistful thought,
She passed me—but I caught
The glorious beauty of her face!

Beneath her garments perfume-fraught
She moved with such a splendid grace,
I knew a strain of music passed —
Her buoyant stepping held me fast!"

As Reeves read this, Alice took the hand which was on her shoulder, and laid her cheek upon it. The tears came in her eyes, and when he had finished, she said in a low voice —

"Oh, I wish I were worthy that poem."

"You are worthy it," said Reeves tenderly, locking his hands under her chin, and kissing her upturned face."

"Oh, no. It is an ideal—it is not me."

"But you see that's what you are—the 'not-me'."

A knock on the door brought a grimace to his face, and Alice, rising, said, "Come in." A large and flabby Irish woman entered, and seeing Reeves and Alice alone, professed the most voluble contrition.

"Bad lúuk to the sowl av me! It's a bloody thief I am to come stalin' in—but Murtagh'll be home sune, an' it's a cu-up o' tay he'll be nadin'? An' is Mrs. Edwards in?"

Mrs. Edwards hearing the high-pitched voice of her neighbor, who "borrowed things", came in, greeting Mr. Reeves in her placid way, in the midst of the never-ending clatter of Mrs. Murtagh's tongue.

"Wull you loan me the lavin' o' tay, Mrs. Edwards? I have a cu-up."

Mrs. Edwards took the cup with an air of long-suffering patience, and returned to the kitchen.

"It's the warst I cud do, to be disturbin' two swatehaarts sittin' like du-uves in a nist"—

"There, there, Mrs. Murtagh," said Alice. "Never mind—you didn't mean"—

"Mane, is it? How cud I knaw, an' the dure an inch thick, and the babby a squall-in' like murther?"

"Never mind that, madam," said Reeves, trying his hand at staying the torrent.

"D'ye hear that now? Madam, sez he! Good luuk to ye f'r that!"

Reeves resorted to stratagem. Going over to the door, he said, "I think I hear Teddy fighting again."

"Fightin' is he? Mother o' God! That

bye's the divil himself. Good luuk to ye, darlint! It's dancin' at y'r weddin' I'll be doin' till ye'll think it's bechune sixteen an' twinty I am." And with much palaver she thanked Mrs. Edwards and withdrew with the cup of tea.

"Heavens and earth! What a scourge!" said Reeves with a sigh.

"Oh, she isn't bad. She has a good heart. But there are people in our block that are dreadful. And it is so hard to escape them in the crowded city.

Reeves shuddered, and said with a tender cadence in his voice, "My poor little girl. Let me take you out of this."

"And leave my parents in it?" she asked in a tone which stopped his mouth. His face darkened over the problem. He dared not push the matter further.

"Well, I must be going back to the office. I'm expected to do an anti-poverty lecture to-night."

"What kind of a lecture?"

"Why, this abolition of poverty idea, started by Henry George—perfectly absurd idea." Alice looked thoughtful.

"I wish the idea wasn't so absurd. I don't understand why poverty should be so persistent in the world. Do you?"

Reeves was profoundly touched by her words and manner. He hesitated and finally said, "Come to think of it, it is more absurd to think the abolishing of poverty absurd. Some way I haven't yet seen where the laugh comes in. I've been thinking a good deal on these social questions lately, and writing a good deal in a way." He mused again for a moment, his eyes on the floor, his hat in his hand. He took another bit of paper from his pocket.

"The air is full of revolt against things as they are. I don't know why, something has brought them up. Here's something I wrote while standing on Brooklyn Bridge the other day, looking down on New York. 'Over me surged and swung those giant cables, etched against the sky, delicate as cobwebs. Under my feet that marvel of man, the bridge itself. I stood there, looking down on that lava-like flood of bricks and mortar called New York,

cracked and seamed and piled into hideous forms, without grace or charm. I saw men rushing to and fro there in those gloomy scenes, like ants in the scoria of a volcano. I saw pale women sewing in dens reeking with pestilence and throbbing with heat. I saw myriads of *homes* where the children could play only on the roof or in the street. Whole colonies of hopeless settlers, sixty feet from the pavement. And I said, man has invented a thousand new ways of producing wealth, but not one for properly distributing it. I don't understand the problem, but it must be solved. Somebody will solve it.'"

He crumpled the paper away in his pocket. "Well, don't mind my firing an editorial at you, will you?" He held out his hand.

"Good-by, my liege lady," he said in mock homage, kissing her fingers. Alice smiled faintly at his playfulness, and after he had gone out, turned to her mother wearily.

"And he feels it, too. Oh, isn't it terrible to be poor, mother?"

"Yes, Allie," said Mrs. Edwards with quiet pathos; "but I've got used to it—I don't expect anything else now—I don't care s' much f'r myself, but I do want to see my children saved from it."

"Oh, how sweet it must be to be free from the fears of poverty," cried the girl. "To feel that you don't need to scrimp and pinch, and turn dresses, and dye feathers, and wear old shoes, and pinch every cent you have. I wonder how it would seem to feel that food would come when you needed it. And then to be free to study. Oh, that would be heaven!"

Mrs. Edwards was moving about the room with that mechanical persistency the never-resting laborer acquires. The impassioned girl saw this at last, and rising, approached her and put her arms around the mother's waist. "How patient you are, mother."

"I have to be, dearie. It wouldn't do no good to cry an' take on. I've got over that."

"Mother, are there any happy people in the world—any working people, I mean?

N

Are they all cross and tired and worried and full of care, as we are here?"

"I don't know, Allie; but when I was a girl back in Derry, it seemed as if most everybody was fore-handed and had enough t' eat. But now it seems as if everybody was strugglin' f'r dear life. It really does. But mercy sakes! What started us off on this strain, I wonder. We mustn't let Jason come in and find us like this. Now you go wash up an' change your dress or put on an apron, an' get the things on. I wonder where Linnie is."

"She's out on the street, waiting for father, I guess."

Mrs. Edwards stopped and looked more concerned than she had before.

"It scares me to have her growin' up on the street so, but I can't see no way to help it. Things wan't so bad when you was little."

Linnie's voice was heard below. "Poppa's come! Poppa's come!"

Jason Edwards entered the street door covered with grime and dust of a machine-shop, a small tin pail in his hand. An

Irishman coming from the opposite direction, said to him with a curious inflection, "I'm out of a job ag'in."

"Is that so, Mike?"

"That's so. They've shut down f'r two munts. Too manny goods—over production ag'in."

"I'm still workin', at the same rate—their 'temporary cut' of ten per cent. ain't likely to be changed, except go lower."

"Oh, they'll cut ye down, be Gob, till they's nawthin' left. All they want now is to raise the rint on us, an' we'll be in the supe."

"They'll do that fast enough," said Edwards, as he began climbing the stairway, Linnie running ahead to announce his coming. As he went in, he made a powerful effort to conceal the gloom and bitterness which was in his heart. He tossed Linnie in his hands. "My gracious! Ain't we gettin' heavy? Mother, seems to me she's growin' fatter in spite of the heat—eh?"

As he hung up his coat and hat, Linnie followed him about, talking. "Oh, poppa,

I made the biscuits all by myself. Momma didn't help me a teenty-tonty bit, hardly, did you, momma?"

"That's my little cook! I don't know how we'd keep house without you. Do you, mother?"

"And, oh, poppa, Mr. Reeves came home with Alice, and I saw" —

"Linnie!" warned Alice.

Edwards smiled while rolling up his sleeves. "Aha, now we're gettin' to it. There can't nothing go on in this ward without Miss Brighteyes knowin' all about it." As he went out into the kitchen, Alice said, half reprovingly —

"Linnie, dear, I'll have to discipline you."

"What's discipline?" asked Linnie flipantly, with the falling inflection on a question, peculiar to the Irish.

"Horrors! What an inflection! Discipline is teaching little girls not to tell tales out of school, and to keep from talking like Teddy Murtagh."

Linnie didn't stay to learn what discipline was, but got the comb out of the

case under the mirror, and drew a chair up facing the window. "I'm all ready," she cried, as Edwards came out of the kitchen, wiping his face and arms. He took his seat in a chair, and put Linnie astride his knees, in an attitude which was a familiar one, and she chattered away childishly.

"Ain't you glad you've got a little girl to comb your hair when you're tired?"

"I guess so. Without my girls I guess we'd surrender, wouldn't we, mother?"

As Mrs. Edwards nodded, he went on in the same tone, "But you're gettin' to be such a great big girl, I'm afraid you won't do this very long."

"Yes, I will; I'll do this just as long—till I'm as big as Alice—yes, longer," asserted Linnie stoutly.

"Oh, you'll be goin' off and gettin' married one o' these days."

"I won't neither," said Linnie pouting. "Now you stop talkin' that way. I ain't goin' to get married 'tall."

"Don't be too sure of that."

"I'm goin' to sit here every night just as long as I live, and comb your hair for

you, and make you sing songs for me. There!" she ended, patting a curl in his hair with her little palm.

Edwards rose, and Linnie put the comb back in the case.

"Well, Jennie," he began in a grave and tender tone, "how goes it with you to-day? Seems terrible hot here to-night. Why don't you have the door open? I swear, it's worse than the shop."

"It always is, Jason, when the wind's in the south-west. But I can't stand the noise, so I keep the door shut. Sometimes it seems 's if I couldn't bear it another minute. But I keep goin', by thinkin' how much worse some other folks is off."

"Yes, that's about the only way to be patient," said Jason bitterly. "Makes me almost wild, when I get to thinkin' of it sometimes."

He went to the sofa and dropped heavily upon it. Linnie got a fan from the wall, and sat down to fan his face. Alice took her place by the head of the sofa and caressed his forehead.

“Poor poppa! It’s terrible to see you so tired. Was it very hard to-day?”

“Just one eternal tread-mill,” Edwards said. “Never a day off. I’m glad I don’t believe in another world,” he said, after a pause. “I shouldn’t be sure of rest, if I was.”

Mrs. Edwards was shocked almost out of her slow, placid way.

“Hush, Jason! It’s wicked to talk like that. It don’t do no good to talk like that—’specially ’fore the children. Come an’ eat something now.”

“What has happened to-day, father?” said Alice quietly. “You haven’t been so discouraged for a long time.”

“Oh, I’m hot and worn out,” he replied evasively.

“It does seem dreadful hot for June,” said Mrs. Edwards, who was seated at the table, waiting for the rest to come and eat.

Edwards raised himself on his elbow, his face softened.

“June? What a lot that word means to the folks in the country!” He sat up and looked around with a darkening face.

"Down here, in this cursed alley, we don't know anything about June, except it makes our tenement hotter an' sicklier an'—w'y, to-night, girls, if we was only back at the old farm, we'd see the meadows knee-deep in grass, and the world would smell like a posy-bed. We didn't look forward to jest this kind o' thing when we left Derry twenty years ago, did we, mother?"

"No, Jason; but it ain't no use, as I see, to worry."

"Oh, poppa, you promised you'd take us back up there—didn't he, Allie? I'm so tired of these hot streets."

Edwards put his arm around her. "I'm afraid there's no vacation for us this year, Linnie. The struggle gets harder and harder. Oh, I'm too tired to eat, Jennie," he ended, sinking back on the sofa.

"Come and try to drink a cup of tea, father," urged Alice. She had more influence over him now than his wife, and at her urging he rose and took a seat at the table, making another effort to throw off his gloom.

"Well, Allie, how'd you come on with your recital—or whatever you call it?"

"Very well, father; only I wish you'd been there to hear me."

"I wish I had, but I couldn't. I've got to keep treadin' to keep our heads above water—rent and taxes go on when I picnic, but wages don't."

Linnie sprang down from her chair, as if something forgotten had occurred to her. She ran to the piano and got a little poster or printed letter-sheet.

"Oh, poppa, a man pushed this under the door while we was away to-day."

It was a notice that after the first of July, 1884, the expiration of his lease, the landlord found it necessary to raise the rent. Please notify, etc. A messenger with a bag full of these notices had been sent out to distribute them in the tenements of the great land-holder whose name was at the bottom.

Edwards sat as if stunned by this last blow—sat and gazed at the paper in his hands. In those few moments he had traced their devious way about the city.

How they were obliged to leave K Street for a poorer place on Carver Street; how from there, where his little boy died, they were forced again to move to poorer quarters, his work making it necessary for him to keep within a certain limit. In his present mood all these things assumed a tragic aspect. His fear and doubt disturbed them, and as his mind ran out into the future, his feelings grew too strong for retention. He sprang up. His face was terrible to see, his hands opened and shut, his eyes blazed.

"Hain't they got no mercy, these human wolves? Hain't it all I can stand now? Look at it!" he cried, flinging his hand out toward the wall. "Look at this tenement—hotter, shabbier, rottener—but rent must go up." His voice choked, he paused and sank back into his chair. At last he said, "Jennie, children, I don't know what we're goin' to do. I don't see what's comin', but we're bein' squeezed out, that's sure."

Mrs. Edwards was crying quietly, while looking at the rent bill. Linnie came to

her father and tried to comfort him with patting him with her little hand.

"Don't cry, poppa. Please don't. It makes my throat ache."

Alice sat white and rigid at the table, her eyes fixed on her father's face. Never before had he given way like this. There was something awful in it. Was he going mad?

"Never mind, Jason. It ain't much. We can git along some way. We have always"—

At this moment some one pushed the door open. A small, pale young man, with a peculiar grimy complexion, and cavernous great eyes, came in, holding a similar rent notice in his hand. As he came forward, another man with a huge beard and smoking a long German pipe, lounged in the doorway, with a peculiar stolid face, but with a mocking, questioning gleam in his eye.

"Aha!" cried the young man, coming forward. "Vat you say now—eh? Ees it not time for to brodest? My vages haf been reduced twice alretty during four years.

My rent haf been raised four times. How? Ees it not hell? I say, vat you do?"

Edwards shook his head. "I don't know, Berg, I don't know."

"I know what I doo—soon," answered the young German darkly, as he turned his face to the man in the door-way. "I make brodest, zo I shall be heardt."

"Oh, don't do that," cried Alice, "you mustn't do that. Keep away from those men who believe in dynamite. They don't belong in our free land"

Berg stopped her with a mocking smile, which was dramatic as a gesture.

"Free? Free to pay rendt in! I fly from dyrants, from vork andt no pay, I reach a free landt where I am a slave under anoder name. I see eferywhere the march of feudalism. I lose hope. Ledt them beware! They squeeze me to de vall. I shall vight. I am a volf at pay. I haf reach my las' hope. If I fall now, I trag somedings mit me."

There was a concentration of purpose in the man's tone which held them all silent, though they could not sympathize with him.

Alice rose and walked up to him. "Don't be rash, Mr. Berg. Don't do that—I mean what you mean. Don't go out with those men—for your mother's sake."

The young German gazed at her for a moment, then drew a long breath.

"For your zake I go not oudt."

"No, no, not for my sake," she protested hastily. "For your mother's sake."

"For your sake," he persisted. "Do you hear?" he said to the silent figure. "*Ich geh' nict heraus.*"

The man at the door laughed silently and went away. Berg also went out, saying, "I come again to see you."

Alice came back to Edwards with a fire in her eyes. "Can't you do something, father? Can't you strike?"

"No, we can't strike," said Edwards spiritlessly. "At least, it wouldn't do any good. What can men do strikin' with families like I've got. Rents goin' up and wages goin' down. I don't see the end of this thing."

"Don't give up, Jason," said Mrs. Edwards, in her monotonous and hopeless

way. "We'll get along some way. We can live in a cheaper tenement."

"I don't want you to do that, Jennie. This is poor enough, God knows."

"I'll give up my studies, father," said Alice, with a firm look. "I'll teach and learn typewriting, and I'll help"—

"It wouldn't save us, my girl. By next year the rents will be higher. It ain't the present that scares me—it's the future. There don't seem to be no hope for the future. I'm gettin' old. I'm liable to break down any day, and be sick for a week or a month, and if I was, we'd need help soon. John's wages jest barely support him and wife and baby. He can't help us, and Linnie ought to go to school, and Allie ought to go on with her music."

"I can give that up—I mean the studying—and I'll make it earn me something. I'll find a way to help"

"So'll I," chirped Linnie, who had nestled between her father's knees. "Poppa, don't you worry—we'll earn money."

"What's the world comin' to, Jason, when sober, hard-workin' people can't get

a decent livin'?" sighed Mrs. Edwards, as she looked sorrowfully over the uneaten supper.

"I don't know. I tell you, Jennie, I've done a pile o' thinkin' down there in the shop since my last cut-down. I've looked at the whole matter fore and aft, up one side and down t'other, an' it's jest a plain case of wages goin' down and rents goin' up, and us bein' squeezed between the two." He thought a moment darkly. "Jest look at it! Here we are finally squeezed into one o' the worst places in the city, simply because rents are so high and wages so low, an' we can't afford car-fare." He was silent a long time. At last Mrs. Edwards spoke.

"Well, less eat some supper, anyway."

They sat up to the table once more, but the meal was a short and scanty one. Each was busy with the problem. Alice toyed with her spoon and cup, looking with wide, unseeing eyes into the future. A great sob of disappointment and hopeless sorrow came in her throat, till it ached with physical strain.

Her thoughts flew to Reeves and then to her music. As she saw again the vast audience in the hall, before whom she had sung and whose applause had been like some strange, vast assurance of her power, and a prophecy of her future triumph, and contrasted that scene with this poor little home in a tenement house, she was bewildered and despairing.

The father, sitting there, was so real and so tragic, with the tired droop in his shoulders and the shadow of defeat in his eyes. The smell of the alley and the sound of the swarming life in the tenement, so powerful that the music-hall and its gay, flattering crowd was like a dream. She was thinking again of Reeves, when her father's voice recalled her. He was saying in a curiously hesitating voice, "If I was a young man—if I had nobody dependin' on me—or if you and I was young, Jennie"—there was such a terrific rush and clatter and screams and sound of blows, that his voice was lost, and he motioned to Linnie to close the door. "Good heavens! It's like livin' in a lunatic asylum."

"That's the reason I keep the door shet," said his wife. "I'd sooner smother than have that noise dingin' in my ears."

"If I was a young man," he resumed, "and the girls didn't need schoolin', they'd be one way out, just one—an' that's to go West—get a piece of free land"—

Alice turned quickly. "Do it now. Do it! We'll go West and help you, won't we? Why didn't we think of it before?" she went on, warming with the idea. "Why, of course, everybody is happy that goes West. It's the only chance for people like us. Everybody says 'go West!' Music teachers do well in the West—quite a lot of the girls are out there"—she rushed on, impetuously carried away with the idea.

Edwards rose and went to the wall where his coat hung, and got out a bundle of maps and posters.

"Well, now you've said that, Alice, I'll own up I've been studyin' the matter for a long time. I've jest about wore these maps out lookin' at 'em down at the shop."

The posters were gaily colored affairs, calling attention to the cheap rates to the "Garden spot of the West". They were the usual western railway folders, with large maps of Dakota and Kansas. "Ho! for the Golden West! Free farms for the homeless!"

Edwards cleared a place on the table, and spread them all out.

"Now, here's Boston, and there's Chicago, and then you go out along that black line till you get there, and there's free land? Free land, mother!" he said, smiling a little for the first time.

"What's free land?" said Linnie, with the Irish inflection.

"Free land is where they ain't no landlords an' no rent," said her father. "Where they ain't no rich an' no poor. Where they ain't no bosses an' no servants. Where people don't live all cooped up in dens like this. Where they raise such corn as that." Here he unrolled a gaudy poster, which showed a bunch of resplendent, enormous ears of corn. "Where people have homes of their own, and cows, and trees,

and brooks full o' trout runnin' by like this," he ended, displaying a poster, on which was an alluring picture of a farmhouse with a broad river in the background, on which a boat floated idly, containing two women, presumably the farmer's wife and daughter. The farmer himself in the foreground was seated on a self-binding reaper, holding the reins over an abnormally sleek and prancing pair of horses. He wore a fine Kossuth hat and a standing collar, and his shirt was immaculate. A deer was looking out at him (with pardonable curiosity) from a neighboring wood-lot. It was the ideal farmer, and the farm of the land-boomer and the self-glorifying American newspaper.

"Oh, let's go!" the little one cried, taking it all literally. "Can't I have a hen, poppa?" she asked, catching sight of a stately flock on parade by the wood-side.

"A dozen of 'em." While Edwards did not take the poster literally, he had the eastern laborer's ignorance of the West. It was all fabulous to him.

"Oh, goody, goody! Let's go to-morrow," chattered Linnie.

"Mother, that's our way out of this hole sure enough. Ed. Ruble and his father went out there. He wrote to me and two of the boys in the shop—cracked the country up great—both gettin' rich, he said. We can build a log house—that'll do for a year or two, till we raise a crop. You can stand a log house, can't you, Jennie?" he said tenderly, putting his hand on his wife's shoulders.

"Of course. We won't mind that. But how'll we get the money, Jason? We ain't got much, an' it'll take a lot o' money to git out there an' git settled fairly."

"We'll manage some way, now you've agreed to go. We'll have to sell the furniture"—

"Oh, will we?" asked Alice.

"Yes, it wouldn't pay to ship it. Some of the things we'll pawn, an' mebbe we can redeem 'em after a year or two. I can raise a few hundred dollars, I guess, all told."

"That old blue Chiny set of mine that Grandfather Baldwin give grandmother—the old man that mends Chiny says its worth a lot o' money—I'll sell that," put in Mrs. Edwards.

"Good!" said Jason, who was looking at the map. "We'll find a way now we've made up our minds to go. If I hadn't been a fool, we'd 'a' gone long 'fore this."

"I wonder if John'll go."

"He would, but his wife won't listen to it. I know, 'cause he told me he'd talked the whole thing over with her. There's the road to health and wealth! Good-by to rents."

Edwards was already expanding with the freedom of it all. He let his imagination have full wing, and as he talked, he seemed like a new man. The breath of a new life seemed to enter into him.

"I see the way out now. By the time Linnie grows up I'll be able to come back here and live independent. I feel as if a pile-driver had rolled off my shoulders."

"You look so, father," smiled Alice. "You look more like your real self now."

I'll take my piano and teach music. Perhaps I can get a place in the schools."

"We'll find plenty to do out there. The thing is, to get out there. Then we're all right. When'll we go?"

"Let's go right off," said Linnie.

"All right," replied Edwards, as if the advice had come from a reliable source.

He was already full of springing dreams. In a vague, sunny field of vision, he saw a comfortable home among the trees, a lake near at hand (or a river), golden fields of grain, and cattle feeding on green hillsides. All the reports of plenty he had ever read came back now to fill his mind. Letters from friends and relatives, newspaper articles, lectures, poems, songs, all the legendary, as well as real prosperity and cheer of the great West.

"What was that old song you used to sing, Jennie, something about 'O'er the hills in legions, boys'—can't you remember it? About buffaloes an' ploughs an' rifles"—

Mrs. Edwards, who was busy about the table, stopped and hummed an old air.

"That's it! That's it!" said Edwards.
"Can't you play it, Allie?"

Alice went to the piano and struck the chords, while Mrs. Edwards sang an old song current years ago, a song which is full of the breath of hope and the peculiar vibrant melody of the pioneer who is born and not made—a song that makes the heart of many a gray-haired man or woman thrill with memories of long journeys, stormy nights, sombre forests and sunny streams—a song that dates far into the forties, bringing forward to us to-day the boundless energy and freedom and imagination of Boone and Crockett, and the men they led into the West.

"Cheer up, brothers, as we go
O'er the mountains, westward ho!
While herds of deer and buffalo
Furnish the cheer.
Then o'er the hills in legions, boys,
Fair freedom's star
Points to the sunset region, boys,
Ha, ha! Ha, ha!

"When we've wood and prairie land
Won by our toil,

We'll reign like kings in fairy-land,
Lords of the soil.
Then o'er the hills in legions, boys,
Fair fields afar!
We'll have our rifles ready, boys,
Ha, ha! Ha, ha!"

And as he sang, he seized Linnie and danced.

IV.

EDWARDS' daily walk was down a narrow street, a drear, desolate, gray crevice, hot and joyless. The hot, dusty gray of the cobble-stones, the brown-gray of the sidewalks, the sullen drab of the houses which lined the way, forming a desolate searing attack upon the eyes, unrelieved by any touch of coolness, harmony or grace.

There was a full half-mile of this, which he traversed daily for twelve years. He knew and hated it in all its phases. Sullen and sombre when it rained, dusty when the wind blew, foul-smelling and damp, bleak and deadly when the cold northern blasts came roaring through it.

The ingenuity of man could not have devised a more sinister, depressing and

hopeless prospect. The houses, mainly wood, opened directly upon the sidewalk. The brick blocks, offering only a slight variation in ugliness; little bake-shops alternated with saloons and fruit-stores, where dusty and specked fruit was offered for sale to the children.

This street Edwards followed till it reached an end in another thoroughfare, along which the horse-cars clashed and tinkled. The last half of his daily walk was out along a street still more nondescript, an indescribable abomination. A street lined with tumble-down sheds in which rags were picked over; sheds where blacksmiths toiled at horse-shoeing or sharpening picks; sheds alternating with vacant lots, with "Free Dump" cards appearing there, showing that some speculator was not averse to having his lot graded for him.

Frightful stench were abroad along this street, offal wagons passed, heavy drays with clashing, clanging loads of iron rolled slowly along, drawn by three horses tandem. The railway side-tracks and shops

were here, and the sound of engines starting and stopping, coupling and jerking, was a daily, hourly tumult.

Shops and foundries of various kinds were located here on this low ground, and along the cindery paths, hot as ashes in the sun, sticky in the rain, a dreary procession of workmen like Jason Edwards plodded sullenly, slouching for the most part with little of the lightness and joy which the morning should possess.

Men with ragged, grimy coats, with dinner-pails in their hands and pipes in their mouths, went to their work, as prisoners to the tread-mill. They had no interest in their tasks, they were working in general to live and feed their children. They were not like craftsmen, but convicts in their joyless walk.

Edwards on this next morning after his determination to go West, walked along this street like a new man. He saw more of the horror—or, more exactly—acknowledged more of it, than he had ever dared before to see or acknowledge. He was like a prisoner whose term of confinement was

expiring, and who could therefore afford to see the terror of the life he was escaping.

The smells were never so offensive, and the low, ramshackle, dingy shed in which he had worked so long never looked so horrible before.

He stopped at the door of the foundry, and called to the man who was working at the furnace. "Hello, Jerry! Goin' to be hot again, ain't it?"

Jerry Sullivan, a fine, stalwart Irishman, came to the door.

"God sakes, man! Wan day's like another to me. But what puts the smile on your face this mornin'?"

"I'm out of it, Jerry."

"Now what's that? 'Out of it'?"

"I'm goin' West." Jerry dropped his bar in astonishment.

"Ye don't mean it, Edwards?"

"I do, Jerry. I'll be damned if I'll stand this any more. I've walked this street for twelve years, and I'm sick of it. I'm out of it."

"I wish to God I was," said Jerry, with a touch of despondency.

"Come along! Try the West."

"I can't get away."

There was a little pause. They watched the men come in with their ragged coats on, and change their tolerably clean shirts for the rags and tatters which did duty in the shop.

"Hello, Pat! How are yeh, this mornin'?" called Edwards, as another man came up.

"It's a-all right for him to be shmilin' this mornin'—he's out of it," exclaimed Sullivan. "I wish I could go with yeh—I'd do it in a minnit—damn me sowl, but I wud."

Four or five now gathered around, eager to hear the plans of Edwards. Not one but said—

"Glad you're gettin' out of it, Edwards. If we could go with yeh—but it's no use talkin'" —

There was something mythic in the West to these men. It represented a far-away, hopeful region, where work was plenty and rents low. Most of them knew very little about the geography of the

West. Montana and Kansas were about the same to most of them, but it was all "West".

It set them dreaming in a curious way, this heroic change of their fellow-workman. It opened anew the possibilities of their going. They crowded around, asking questions, forgetful that the "boss" had entered.

"Come, get to work here," sounded the harsh, almost brutal voice of the foreman. "You'd better look out Locke and Bradley don't jump on your neck," he said to Edwards in a more jovial tone, as he came up.

"They've got through jumpin' on my neck," replied Edwards.

He felt a delicious sense of freedom. He could have sung—in fact, he did make a pleasant noise which he called singing. He was in no hurry to go to his own shop, so dropped in a moment in a shop where wood-work for carriages was turned out.

A particular friend, an Englishman, by the name of Jasper Barker, worked here as machinist. He was in earnest conver-

sation with Julius Berg when Edwards entered. Both shouted above the noise of the shop, and motioned a welcome.

"I'm goin'," said Edwards with vast elation.

"So 'e tells me. Well, h'I'm glad somebody gets hout of it. H'I'd get out myself honly h'I'm a-gettin' along in years, and the children and heverythink. H'it's the think to do, though. W'en you go?"

"Right off next month. Berg says he's goin', too."

"So I am. I shall not stay do vork lige a nigger—see dose men vork."

Edwards looked at the two men who were bending hot steaming strips of wood around huge semi-circular blocks. They used heavy machinery, but the work was terrific, and the heat intense. One man was a bulldog in shape and movement, and was a prize-fighter fallen to this—or risen to this—as one looks at it.

The other was a curious combination of timid face, retreating chin, narrow, brainless skull, but tremendous power and endurance. The sweat streamed in tor-

rents from both. They did not look up. They worked as silently as a bulldog fights.

Together they swung the huge forms to the axis, then while the prize-fighter pulled down the wide iron band which encircled the block, the tall man placed four of the steaming felloes upon the band. The machinery was started by the fighter, the form revolved, the banded wood and iron bound upon the same circular block, was fastened, and together they lifted the heavy block away beside others.

"Andt all dat for ten tollars a veek," said Berg. "They are not men, they are masshines."

Edwards walked on. There were some little things he wished to do, and then he purposed gathering up his tools.

"Look here, Edwards, you can't leave this way without notice."

"How much notice are you in the habit of givin' the men you discharge?" replied Jason. "Besides, I've got a man to take my place—better man than I am. I've got through with you, or anybody like yeh. I've been a slave about long enough."

As Edwards looked in at the foundry door on his way back, about five o'clock, men were "pouring". It was a grewsome sight. With grimy, sooty shirts, open at the throat, in a temperature of deadly heat, they toiled like demons. There was little humanity in their faces, as the dazzling metal threw a dull-red glow on them.

Here and there, with warning shouts, they ran, bent like gnomes, with pots of shining, flame-colored liquid lighting their grimy faces. Here toiled two stalwart fellows, with a huge pot between them; with hoarse shouts they drew up beside a huge "flask" or moulding-box. The skimmer pushed away the slag, the radiant metal leaped out and down into the sand, sending spurts of yellow-blue flame out of a half-hundred crevices.

There was a man calking the next flask with wet sand. He paid no attention to the pot of deadly liquid, which passed close enough to singe his hair. A little further on, another man was knocking off the clamps that held the flask together. Every-

where was heat, the smell of burning wood, gases, steam, and the sight of leaping, exploding, shining metal.

Edwards looked up at Jerry, who stood beside the furnace, stripped almost to the skin, in a heat that would kill a man unaccustomed to it, heaving scraps of iron into the horrible cauldron, which he was obliged to stir occasionally with a long bar. Below him stood another half-naked man, whose business was to alternately open and shut the vent of the furnace.

Sometimes, as he punched his bar into the vent and let the terrifying flood of gleaming metal out, it exploded all over him in showers of bursting sparks, like an explosion of Roman candles, making him leap aside to avoid the burning shower.

The metal fell with a beautiful parabola into the pots held below, while the man with the bar seized a handful of fire-clay and moulded it upon the long staff, in form like a cork, and at the word of the foreman, or when pots were filled, he rammed the clay into the vent, and the flow ceased,

only to be opened again a few moments later, with the same shower of sparks.

Jason Edwards remained a long time looking at this scene. Its terror came in upon him as never before. That men should toil like that for ten dollars per week, as Berg had said, was horrible.

"I would preak into chail pefore I do dat," Berg's words had run.

A big, hearty man, a little gray in his full beard, came out of a dingy little office near by, and joined Edwards.

"I hear you're going to leave us."

"Who told you?"

"Jerry."

"Well, I am. I don't never want to see this thing again."

"Pretty tough job these hot days, sure."

"And all for ten dollars a week!"

"And that's all I can afford to pay 'em. I won't make five hundred dollars clear of expenses this year. I'm pinched, too. I don't get anything out of it."

"Who does? The angels don't get it."

* * * * *

On his way home Edwards stopped for

a moment at the only pleasant spot on his walk, and looked across the flat to the far-off hills. As he stood there wondering why those hills should be so inaccessible, he heard the thrillingly sweet *fan-fare* of a coaching-trumpet, and the next moment down the street came two coach-loads of young people.

Ribbons gayly fluttering, eyes dancing with pride and pleasure, some of them flushed with wine. One young girl held the whip, the postilion held the shining horn to his lips, signalling all carts and drays to get out of the way. With a whirl of dust, and grind of wheels and jingle of chains and bits, the coach-loads passed, just as the men in the foundry up the street dropped their pots and stripped their ragged shirts from their sooty, tremulous muscles.

V.

IT would not be true to say that Reeves had not estimated fairly the resistance which the peculiar feeling of Alice offered to his marriage idea. He had already learned something of the immense force resident in that slender body, and something of the iron will that lay behind that delicate oval of face, from which the brave eyes looked unwaveringly.

He could see them now, as he sat at his desk. He had finished his work in the office, and was ready to go out. He should have been at lunch, but here he sat, dreaming of Alice, and studying the problem.

"There's abundant good sense in what she says," he thought, gazing at the flower-like electric lamp which hung, a pale-faced morning-glory, before him. "It is a hard problem. It isn't merely a matter of help-

ing them over a bad spot—it's a matter of domesticating them in my house, or providing for their living—and to her it has something like the air of charity. I suppose she's looking forward to the future, of making a big hit, and taking care of them herself. Well, there's nothing for it but to wait"—

"Hello!" exclaimed Daggett. "Ain't you going to attend to the meeting down to the Temple?"

"Of course—by Jinks. Eight o'clock—thanks!"

"Oh, I know how it is myself," grinned Daggett. "Had such moments of dreaming myself—when I have nothing to do now I sleep."

Reeves went down the elevator, thinking about that last phrase. Somehow, it bit into his mind. Odd his mind should suddenly be made so receptive of these ideas. First Alice, and now Daggett, cynical, hard, dry old Daggett, had set him thinking.

Was it not true that most men, when their work was ended had only energy

enough left to sleep? Was it not true that American business life was sapping too much from the intellectual life of its people? he asked himself as he went down the street.

The immense hall was crowded to the doors, and on the stage was a short man with a large brow and finely-shaped head, speaking with a peculiar, vibrating, crisp and expressive intonation, while the audience was cheering wildly. His words were singularly well chosen, and his style was simple, bare of ornament, and entirely individual. He walked about the platform noiselessly and unconsciously, and his face, very sensitive and expressive, showed sincerity and enthusiasm.

The sentences which he heard as he entered were the ones which seemed to Reeves the most striking of all that was said, and lived longest in his mind:

"We do not believe in charity. We hate charity, because it is not justice. It is a palliative of the evils caused by injustice. It degrades and debases. It results from a system essentially wrong, a sys-

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tem which denies human rights. The most ominous of all signs is the growth of the need of charity in the midst of abounding wealth. Equal rights to all, and special privileges to none, strictly interpreted, is the solution."

On the whole, Reeves listened to the speaker in a professional way, making various mental notes for his editorial the next day, admiring the spirit of the orator, but believing him to be more of a poet than a practical economist. The meeting itself, however, was a revelation. It told him of how much discontent there was in the city at large, and in his article the next day he said as much under the usual impersonal "we".

"Mr. George, whose genius we admire, is right in saying that something is wrong, but as for his panacea, we do not place much importance upon that. But finally, we repeat that too much importance cannot be placed upon the fact that two thousand people met in Tremont Temple to cheer the sentiments that social conditions are unjust. That is the important thing

to remember—not the fine-spun theories of a dreamer like Mr. Henry George.”

When he came down to the office next morning, the city editor was reading the proof of his judgment.

“You hit it about right,” said he to Reeves. “The trouble is deep—too deep for any such three-cent remedy as taxing site value.”

“How’s that?” asked Reeves, astonished.

“I say we’ve got to have something more radical than a system of taxation to cure this thing”—

“Say, don’t talk so loud,” put in the exchange editor, who was pillowed in the morning papers. “You infernal old anarchist”—

“I thought George sufficiently radical,” said Reeves, taking off his coat.

“Radical!” said another. “He’s a conservative from my point of view.”

“Why, Merrill, what’s made *you* break out in this new spot?”

“It ain’t a new spot.”

“Ain’t?”

“No, I’ve been a red-handed-something-

'r-other ever since I bought that land out in Dorchester. Paid five hundred for my lot, went to work and built a good house on it. Next year thought I'd buy a lot for my brother's widow to build on—by Jinks! he wanted a thousand dollars for it."

"Well, that's all right, ain't it?" said the exchange editor. "The land had increased in value."

"Yes—my work and money increased the value of his lot, and he got it. It's all wrong, I tell you!" And he slammed a handful of copy into the lift and sent it whirling up to the composing-room.

"Now that's the way some people reason," philosophized Daggett. "By the way, there's a note for you on my desk. Boy made a mistake and left it in my box."

The note was from Alice, and asked him to call soon, as she had something important to say to him.

Reeves' spirits rose with a bound. She was going to consent. She had thought it all over, and was going to give up the struggle. He whistled as he worked, and

his face shone so that his companions noticed it.

"Reeves looks as if he had been made over new. I wonder if it can be the result of the anti-poverty meeting."

"Possibly he found out how to get rich. If he has, I hope to God he'll let me know the secret," put in the financial editor, who was busy over the stock exchange reports.

"Oh, Reeves ain't thinkin' o' that—it's some girl 'r other," Daggett shouted, thrusting his head out of his distant stall. "I know all about it. Used to be a great hand with the girls myself."

"Yeh don't say so," said the military editor. "Lookin' as you do."

"Lookin' as I *did*," Daggett replied. "I could whistle, an' chaw gum, an' write an editorial—all at the same time then. By the way, Reeves, that's a very judicious little article this morning—just the right tone. We don't want to jump on a man just because he's got a crazy, beautiful scheme in his head—nothing like getting the right tone—oh, by the way, Merrill, I

wish you'd write an article—column or so—on that Cobden Club bugbear. I see the *Chronicle* is out with a scare-head this morning—cut into 'em sharp"—

And so the work went on. At intervals Reeves pondered on the subject of that letter, and as the hour for his release drew near, he was not so happy over it. The interview was momentous and meant immediate happiness, or a long separation. Somehow he couldn't make himself believe it was either of these things. It seemed impossible that a girl could hold out against such great odds.

It was the play-spell in the office, and the editors were smoking and pretending to be busy. They saw Reeves beginning to get ready to go out, and began:

"Say, Reeves, I'd like to have you throw off a couple of sticks about this bloody dog-show," said Daggett.

"Oh, bother your show!"

"By the way, Reeves," said the military editor, "I heard a capital new story the other day about Dr. Johnson—sit down here"—

"I really don't think that hat becomes him well—do you?" chimed in the literary editor. "It gives him a depressed look which is out of keeping."

Reeves fled. They were all good fellows, but he didn't care to be joked this night.

VI.

THE street was again crowded with people, but differently—they had eaten their suppers, young and old, and now in the falling dusk, were out of doors to get a little rest and fresher air. It was not and could not be fresh air. The children were playing still, but a little less wildly. Girls of fifteen or seventeen, hardly more than children, were promenading up and down the streets, chatting among themselves and exchanging dubious sentences with groups of young men and boys standing in the doorways, insolent and noisy, boys with savage, cruel, sneaking mouths, and evil eyes.

Many of these young people, already old in vice, were talking horribly and laughing senselessly, as they stood in dark nooks and doorways, while their toil-worn and

weary mothers were working within doors, clearing away the supper dishes, or putting the younger children to bed, having neither time nor patience to watch over their grown-up sons and daughters.

The older men smoked on stolidly, as they sat on the door-steps, filling the street with poisonous smoke. Some of them sauntered down to the saloon on the corner, and some were talking politics in the middle of the street. Most of them paid very little attention to Reeves, but the girls snickered as he passed. One or two said, "Ah, there!" in that indescribable tone which is both a jest and an invitation. Some of the men looked after him with an envious spirit, and some of the young men sent out a volley of low-spoken jibes. He walked on, with more of pain and disgust than rage in his heart.

He seemed to see more of the hideous future of these people, these young people born for a prison or a brothel in so many cases. How long can this disease go on intensifying, he thought. He stopped a moment, and looked at it all with a sud-

den sweep of the eye, a hot, unwholesome alley, swarming with vicious and desperate life—a horribly ugly, graceless, badly-lighted alley, poison-tainted, vice-infected. He thought of the miles of such streets in Boston, a street almost typical. Boston was predominantly of this general character, as he well knew. The real Boston does not get itself photographed and sent about the country.

It was quieter up near the Edwards' tenement, and Linnie and Jason sat talking in the shadow of the doorway. The picture of the ideal farm on the poster had made a profound impression on the little one's mind.

"And we can have a boat, can't we?"

"I guess so."

"And does the grass come right up to the door?"

"Right smack up to it. When you go out the door—*splush*—there you are right in it."

"Oh, I wish we was out there now! Don't you, poppa? There ain't no birds here, 'cept sparrows, and they don't sing."

"They're too busy gettin' a livin' to sing."

Reeves stepped up before them. "Good evening, Mr. Edwards."

"Good evenin', Mr. Reeves—didn't see yeh. Linnie, run up an' tell Allie Mr. Reeves is here. Sorry I can't offer you a chair on my verandy—but if you'll come out West a couple o' years from now, I'll do it"—

"Out West!" exclaimed Reeves. "You don't mean to say you're going—"

"West—just that, exactly. I've stood this kind o' thing"—he looked around—"about as long as I can. I've decided to make a break f'r freedom—f'r tall timber, as they say out West."

This involved so much that Reeves was silent, waiting for him to go on.

"There ain't no fair sight f'r me here," Edwards went on, "and now mother and the girls are ready to go"—

"Is Alice going?"

"That's the calculation. She thinks there'll be a good chance out there to teach music. But go up and see her—she's up stairs."

Reeves went up the stairs slowly, thinking rapidly. It was absurd how low his spirits had fallen. When he entered the door which Linnie held open, Alice was seated by the window, gazing at a little patch of the sky, which showed between the tenement blocks—just a hint of the sunset's glory.

"What's this I hear, Alice—are you going West to grow up with the country?" he asked with an assumption of gaiety which he did not feel.

She turned to meet him, very gravely. He went on in a different voice then:

"It can't be possible you are going."

"Sit down here, Walter—I've got so much to say to you. Yes, we're going—as soon as possible. June is a good time to go."

"But I don't understand. It's well enough for your father to go, but I can't think of your going. I want you to stay with me, Alice."

There was poignant appeal in these few words, and they shook her powerfully.

"I can't do that—they need me." She

was not quite decisive, after all, and he did not believe it.

"What can you do?"

"I can teach. There are good chances in the West for teachers, and I will get a school near the farm."

"But what of me? What of our plans?"

"We must wait."

Reeves rose and stood beside her chair. "Alice, do you know what that means to us?"

"I know what it means to father and mother and Linnie," she answered evasively. She took a morbid delight in keeping her voice hard and cold.

"Alice, you're leaving me," he cried despairingly.

"For a short time."

"I'm afraid for ever."

"Can't you trust me?"

"No—not two thousand miles away."

"Then our engagement had better be broken off now," she said with quick resentment.

"Be careful!"

"I mean it. I don't want you to be"—

"Alice, you are leaving me." He was deeply moved. He could not understand her motive or her mood.

"I begin to lose hope. Will you ever come back to me?"

"Yes, when I can come right. When my people are not objects of charity. Now please don't talk of that any more now. I can't bear it. It is so hard to leave beautiful musical and art life of Boston, just when it seems opening to me. Don't make it harder for us."

"Alice," said Reeves, coming out of a deep fit of musing, "if your voice were as hard and cold as your words, I'd leave this house and never see you again—but it ain't—you do care for me. It is hard for you to turn away from me and all that I offer, so I hope to have you coming back one of these days, like the poor little dove you are, to her nest."

"Would you rather have me come a poor helpless thing, or a woman?"

There was something in her face and voice which he could not understand—a faint light from the patch of sky was on

her averted face, as she asked him that question.

Reeves rose despairingly. "Will you write?"

"I will write—yes, of course," she replied, looking at him, and when Mrs. Edwards brought the lamp in, Alice was still sitting at the window, looking out at the fragment of sky, into which a star had bloomed.

PART II—THE FARMER.

I.

IT was a very quiet day in Boomtown, an intolerably hot, dry day in early July, 1889. The streets were practically deserted. Here and there a team, with tired, drooping heads, stood panting at the blazing wooden side-walks, while their drivers sat under the awnings before the shops, or clinked beer-mugs inside the cool, damp saloon.

Boomtown was the usual prairie town, absolutely treeless, built mainly of wood, and scattered about on the dun sod like a handful of pine blocks of irregular sizes and shapes.

Most of the buildings had huge battlements fronting the principle streets, and

awnings over the front, which made an admirable lounging place for the clerks, who found little to do these hot, dry days but sit on nail-kegs and boxes and toss pennies.

It was just before harvest, and the farmers were pushing haying to their utmost, and had not yet begun to buy their provisions. Beside, there was not a little uncertainty as to the possibility of a harvest. A vast simoon-like wind was sweeping up from the South, and it was the critical stage between flower and fruit. The wheat might be prevented from filling—this wind had been blowing at intervals for a week, and was commencing again on this particular morning.

The radiant sky soaring in incommunicable splendor above the parched plain, with its anxious dwellers, had, however, a faint, all but imperceptible, whitish tone, as if a silvery vail were being slowly drawn athwart the blue, from the South. Some of those most weather-wise said this meant rain, but most observers saw little encouragement in such impalpable change.

Judge Balser's office was a favorite lounging place for the old settlers of Boomtown. It was a small, wooden building, with an enormous battlement, on which was painted in large black letters, (a relic of the days of early settlement eight years ago) "Judge S. H. Balser, Land Agent and Attorney-at-Law. Claims located, Final Proofs Made Out, etc., etc." It was on the south side of the street, and was one of the coolest places in town, a fact well known to the loafers.

The judge looked very natty in his neat gray suit, his beard nicely clipped, his cuffs immaculate, and was sitting with his neatly-shod feet high on his desk beside his pearl-gray high hat. He was smoking daintily, and reading a paper spread on his knee.

Frank Graham, a stalwart fellow, in his shirt-sleeves and with the wicker cuffs commonly worn by grocers, on his wrists, was also seated with his feet in air, poised on the edge of a table which sat in the middle of the floor. Hank Whiting, proprietor of the "Western House", sat near the win-

dow, his feet on the sill, his vest unbuttoned, and his hat on his neck.

It was very still in the office, save when the judge rustled a paper—so still that the flies could be heard buzzing against the window-panes, and the distant clink of an anvil came with weirdly muffled sounds, joined with the occasional clang of the bell of the switch engine at the upper end of the street. Whiting was dozing, Frank was evidently dreaming, but not dozing.

Suddenly the judge yawned, laying down his paper and raising his arms above his head in a prolonged stretching. "Oh, ho, ho! The '*Argus*' still lives."

"What's the matter now?" asked Frank listlessly.

"Oh, the same old grind."

And as the others listened he read in a languid way the following editorial, and the contrast with the judge's lazy voice was very marked.

"It is with sorrow, therefore, that we see the noble profession of journalism trampled in the mire by such vandal

hoofs"—the judge paused, knocked the ashes from his cigar daintily with his ringed little finger.

"Vandal hoofs ain't bad."

"By such vandal hoofs as those of the editor of the '*Bellplain Argus*'. Were we the only ones to suffer from these vile vituperations of the paltry poltroon and limitless liar"—

"Good," said Frank, roused out of his listlessness. "Limitless liar is immense—Shakespearean, in fact. Wilson ought to hear that."

The judge proceeded. "Limitless liar and troglodite"—

"Troglodyte! Well, now! Must be a new hand on the '*Pulverizer*'. Does he pay his respects to the '*Spike*'? What does he call the Major?"

The judge laid down the paper and yawned again heavily, and then rose and removed his coat, put his hat on to get it out of the way, tipped it back on his neck, and sat down at his table before answering. "Oh, yes. Same old bluff. Says our boom is on the down grade, that the railroad is

going to be extended, and leave us—and so forth.”

Frank looked slyly around, then said in a voice of confidence, “Well, don’t let it get out. But I haven’t averaged twenty-dollars’ sale this last week.”

Whiting opened his lank jaws at this moment to say, “That’s nawthin’—leetle slow now, but things ’ll boom in a week ’r two.”

The judge was also confident.

“’Course it will. This is just a sort o’ breathin’ spell. Everybody lettin’ go to get a better hold.”

“Trouble is there’s a lot o’ fellows never had any kind of a hold to let go of. This is the third season of short crops, and fellows like John Boyle and Edwards are going to let go and go under, unless they have help.”

Whiting admitted the truth of this, but the judge was irritated by it. He brushed the ashes from his cigar and spoke with more of feeling than he was accustomed to show. “Yes, I know there’s a lot o’ such fellows, cussin’ the country,

but what could they expect? Come out here expecting to find free land laying around loose. A man can't start in a new country without money."

"Where else could he start better?" inquired Frank, winking at Whiting. "I thought the West was just the place for a poor man."

The judge whirled about impatiently. "That's nothing to do with it. As I told Edwards when he first came, first man on the spot rakes the persimmons—you can take your choice, go thirty miles from a railroad and get government land, or give me ten dollars an acre for my land. It was his own choice."

Frank whistled softly to himself, and at last said, "A man once jumped overboard because he wanted to. It was a free choice—only the ship was on fire—that's about as much free choice as Edwards had."

"That's none o' my business," said the judge, resuming work. "I sell."

"It's almighty hard lines for Edwards," Frank went on. "His crops haven't been

anything extra, and he's in a hole. All that keeps 'em from going under is that girl. She manages to pay grocery bills with her teaching."

"Fine woman!" observed the judge, with mild interest. "By the way, do you know anything about her Boston dude?"

"Not much—somebody said he was coming out—Nasby Blume, I guess. There's nothing like being postmaster to know all about such things. Nasby says they write a good deal."

"Has the fellow ever been out here?"

"I don't think he has. I never saw him."

They all fell silent again, after the manner of sleepy men on a drowsy day, the judge scratching away slowly on his paper, Frank gazing out of the window. A hen began to cackle. "Say, Judge, you'd better throttle that hen—sounds too pastoral—takes the wire-edge off your street car talk." The judge wrote on calmly.

Presently a tall old man in a faded plug hat and a linen duster came along the sidewalk, met another somewhat younger man,

a farmer-like person, with an old slouch hat and a long, ragged beard. He had a rake on his shoulder, and a white jug in his hand.

"How air yeh, Daddy?" he said, greeting the old man in a jocular voice. "How is this for high?"

"Purty high," answered Daddy Ruble. "Purty high! How's the crops?"

"Purty dry, purty dry!"

"Purty tuff on the farmers," went on Ruble in a high-keyed voice, as they seated themselves on a bench just outside the door, and under the window. The back of their heads showed comically just above the window-sill.

Frank laughed and winked at Whiting. "Sh! There'll be music. They'll fight—they always do."

"Yes, 'specially with sugar-trusts a boomin' sugar s' high yeh can't touch it with a ten-foot pole," Johnson went on, "an' coal kings reg'latin' the price o' coal come winter. This administration"—

"Now go on," flared Daddy. "Go on! Lay the weather to the administration.

'Course it's the fault o' the administration—everything can be laid to the"—

"Wal! It 'd help us pull through if the administration would let sugar in free"—

"Oh, go on—go on!" shrieked Ruble, leaping up in a frenzy.

"Oh, I'm a goin' on—don't worry," answered Johnson coolly. "Where's the boom we was goin' to see when this ad——"

"You'd lay the hot wind to the administration, I believe, you old fool!"

"Se' down—set down, Daddy! Don't tear y'r shirt. You'll live jest as long." With some difficulty Daddy was induced to sit down, and the wagging of their heads went on, though their words were inaudible.

The judge paid no attention, but Frank was shaking with laughter. "See them two old seeds," he whispered tragically to Whiting. "They think they run Congress, and they neither of 'em know Jackson's dead. Now listen! Johnson'll wind Ruble up. He always does. Let her go, Gallagher!"

Johnson's voice, rising above the other

man's murmur, could be heard, "What I'm saying is this—we don't get no protection on our wheat, an' too dum much on our sugar. I don't believe in no such scheme"—

"Shut up, you ol' copper-head!" shouted Ruble, shaking his trembling fist in Johnson's face. "You don't know beans, you"—

"Set down, you ol' jackass, an' talk sense. When I corner yeh, y' alwiz go off"—

"I ain't a goin' off! Y' can't corner nawthin'—I'm goin' to stay right here," shrieked Ruble.

Once more Johnson got him to sit down, while he poured poison into his ear. Frank, convulsed with laughter, silently went to the wall and pretended to crank each of them up. Their voices grew angry and loud again, and Ruble sprang up, unable to contain himself.

"There! I jest callated you'd get to that dum taxation scheme finally! I won't listen—I won't hear a word!"

"Set down! Don't go off half-cocked!"

roared Johnson. "You've got to listen. Set down and take y'r medicine like a man—you old land-shark!"

"No more a land-shark 'n you be," snarled the frenzied old loafer

"Less see if you haint. What're yeh holdin' them lots for?"

"F'r a higher price. Ain't that all right? Ain't that my business?"

"I don't know whether 'tis or not."

"Wal, I do."

"No, y' don't. You'll find out the assessor 'll have sumthin' t' say about that. Now, don't git in a sweat. Wha'd yeh pay f'r them lots?"

"None o' y'r business—fifty dollars."

"Wha'd yeh sell one f'r t'other day?"

"Seven hundred; but whose business"—

"Now listen," grinned Frank. "Johnson's goin' t' rip 'im up the back with the single-tax idea—see his game?"

"Did you make it worth that money?" Johnson was demanding. "Did you ever lay a hand to them lots? Ain't you reapin' where you haint sowed, you infernal old sponge?"

"Don't you call me a sponge," cried Ruble, raising his cane. Frank stepped to the door to stop them.

"That's jest what you are," roared Johnson, also rising. "An' if we don't make you sell or use them lots this year, call me a sucker!"

"You're a dumned old alliance crank!"

"That's what I am. An' you can't set around here on your pants an' get rich out o' honest men"—

Ruble was about to strike him, when Frank, weak with laughter, but outwardly calm, called out—

"Hold on, there! No fighting allowed on the grounds. Daddy, if you can't keep your whipple-tree off the wheel, don't kick over the tongue. Gentlemen, both, allow me to say that Jackson is dead, and that the cruel war is over. In the words of our immortal general, 'let's have peace'."

As Johnson turned to go, he slyly swung the tail of his rake around and knocked Daddy's hat into the gutter, and scrambled wildly away with shouts of laughter, while Daddy sputtered and Frank laughed. And

then, as if an echo of his voice, came a penetrating, powerful peal of laughter, followed by others, in rhythms like the drumming of a partridge—an irresistible chorus.

“Hello!” said Frank. “Happy Elliott’s in town—no discount on that laugh.”

Elliott came to the door, and bracing his hands against the door-frame, looked in and laughed. He was a fat man with a red face and sandy whiskers.

“Hello, you old porpus!” said Frank, as he sat down again. “How do you stand the heat?”

“Purty nigh unsolders me,” answered Elliott. “Hello, Judge. Judge always looks to me like a red-headed, slick-bellied ol’ spider waitin’ f’r flies.” Elliott chuckled till he was forced to sit down on the door-sill and mop his face.

“Sweat some these days?” asked Frank.

“Bout ’nough t’ keep me from season-checkin’. How goes it?”

“First rate. How are you?”

“All broke up on my wheat.”

“You look it,” put in the judge.

Elliott looked at him comically. “All

that keeps me alive is the hope o' dyin' some day, an' goin' t' heaven an' bein' able to let down chunks of ice at a thousand dollars a pound to cool the judge below."

"He looks cool and sweet now."

"Yes; nothin' like holdin' the money end of a morgidge—eh, Judge?"

"No, except holding two," the judge replied coolly, going on with his work.

Elliott looked at him admiringly. "Ain't he a daisy! Ain't he a tulip! While me an' Edwards are worried t' death over the crops, the judge sits here, cool as a toad in a cellar, and harvests his interest slick's a cat can lick her ear."

"Nothin' like it," said the judge.

"Has he got a heart?" asked Elliott, after a pause.

"Who? Judge? Naw! His heart's only a little hydraulic ram?"

Elliott roared till he nearly fell to the floor with exhaustion. The judge calmly worked away.

"Think o' the judge up to his neck in brimstone an' prayin' f'r ice—

"There's a boomin' ol' boomer
On the lake below,
Oh, how I long to see that day;
Up to his neck in the brimstone flood,
Oh, how I long to see!"

sang Frank, and Elliott joined in.

"Judgment, judgment, judgment day is a sailin'
around,"—

"Wall, this won't buy the baby a shirt,
n'r pay f'r the one it has got," said Elliott,
rising and going out. "Keep an eye on
him."

"Elliott sheds trouble like punkins off a
hay-stack," said Whiting.

"His laugh's as good as a brass-band,"
replied Frank. "Everybody's got to keep
step.

And then a silence fell on them. The
flies buzzed and butted their heads at the
window. The crickets and grasshoppers
kept a steady buzz, and the wind wan-
dered listlessly through the room, scarcely
adding coolness to the air. At last Frank
yawned—

"Well, this won't do f'r me." He rose, and going to the door, looked down the street. "This is the deadeast day I ever saw in Boomtown—Great Cæsar's ghost!" he yelled suddenly.

The judge languidly looked over his shoulder, and asked listlessly—

"Dog-fight?"

"A plug hat!"

"No!"

"A tailor-made suit"—

"No, I say," yelled the judge, in great excitement.

"It can't be!"

"It is!"

"Where, f'r heaven's sake!"

"Just come out of the Sherman house. Coming this way!"

They made a rush for the door, where all three struggled together to look out.

"He's aimin' f'r here, Judge."

"He's a tenderfoot, sure."

"Nail him, Judge."

"You may trust me. Watch me?"

II.

REEVES had never been out to see Alice and her people, and for several reasons. In the first place, his duties as editor were very binding, allowing him only two weeks' vacation, and beside, he wanted the invitation to come from Alice, and he fully expected her "foolish, morbid pride" to give way. So he waited.

She wrote very regularly, but coldly and formally. She hoped each year that "crops would be better", or "prices higher", and avoided a discussion of their life problem. She asked of the concerts and lectures and theatres, and he sent her books and magazines, and so year after year went by, very swiftly with him, as with most busy men—and neither of them had made any decisive movement.

There were times when he almost determined to give her up. He had brought his mother from the old town in which he was born, and they lived in his fine cottage in Meadow View—lived very quietly. In his study, which he allowed few of his friends to enter, he had a life-size portrait of Alice, just before him as he sat at his desk. It would be betraying a confidence to say how many hours he sat looking into those wistful eyes, that affected him as some of the songs of Schumann did—producing a sadness of exquisite pleasure.

Jerome Austin said to him one day, "Most extraordinary case of my experience. (Jerome had painted the picture.) "Quite like the poems we read. Why, man, such constancy doth amaze me! Go forth into the world—it is full of women, and women are flesh and blood and apprehensive. Still, I don't deny," he mused thoughtfully, stepping back to admire the picture, "there is something extraordinary about that face. It's got what we painters call character in it. I wish she was here" —

"So do I," said Reeves smilingly.

"So I could paint her from life. I remember her color was very delicate, but I can't recall just how it played in the cheek and chin."

Reeves used to sit in his study with her latest letter in his hand, and wonder, and go over and over the problem.

"It's of no use to say her feeling is morbid and her pride mistaken," he said once to his mother, a quiet, refined woman of feeble health, "the feeling exists, and I don't see any hope of her yielding as long as she feels it her duty to stay with her parents. There is nothing to do but to wait."

"But, Walter, I want to see you have a wife to take care of you when I am gone. I don't know whether you ought to consider yourself bound to her or not"—

"That's hardly the way to put it, mother," he said, smiling a little. "I couldn't forget her if I tried. I don't want to be released—I don't want any other woman—I want her. You"—

"I don't see what there is"—

"That's because you didn't see her, mother. Love may be a habit—it's my habit to think of her."

"Well, I'm sure you need some one to look after you—and I'm getting old"—

"There, mother, now don't talk that way. Why, you're as pretty as a peach, and spry—why, you are as spry as I am, yet."

It was, however, the death of his mother, that decided him to make a visit to the prairie and bring Alice back with him. He didn't put it otherwise—she must come back with him. Life was unbearable in his empty house, and his heart went out in an irresistible impulse toward that womanly girl on the far prairie.

He determined to take her by surprise, but relented at the last moment, and sent a letter to apprise her of his coming. When he left Meadow View, the trees were in fullest leaf, the birds were rioting in the mid-summer madness of song, and all along the way to Chicago and beyond he saw the same luxuriance.

He saw vast fields of broad-leaved corn,

tossing in the brisk wind like an army's flashing spears. The bob-o-links soared and tinkled, the hawks swam in the lazy air, the mowing-machines clattered through the thick grass, and here and there around a field of rye or barley a reaper was going, its reel-blades flashing like swords in the sun.

On the afternoon of the third day his heart began to grow oppressed with the level landscape of Western Minnesota. As the railway left the Minnesota woods and lakes and struck out on the wide prairie, dotted here and there with small white cottages, he began to wonder if Edwards had settled in a land like that; could his house be so lone as that? Night settled down over him while the train pushed into the lonely land.

It was seven o'clock in the morning when the car came to a stand, and from his berth in the sleeper he heard the voices of men as they tumbled trunks out of the baggage car. He knew that this was his destination, and hastily making his toilet, he stepped out on the platform, and looked upon Boomtown and its famous valley.

He saw one main street dividing in half what looked like a miscellaneous heap of wooden houses, with here and there an ambitious brick building or church-spire rising from the crowd. The streets stretched away toward an endless sea-like infinity of plain. And when he turned and looked in the opposite direction it was the same level, variegated expanse. The line of telegraph poles ran straight as a rifle barrel till the curve of the earth hid them from sight. It was warm, and the sky was perfectly cloudless.

By the time he had washed the dust and grime from his person and got his breakfast, it was nine o'clock, and he started to find the Edwards family. That was his main task—incidentally the town interested him. At last he was recommended to Judge Balser's as a good place to secure information.

As he neared the door the judge walked briskly over to a big book which lay on a sort of shelf-desk, and was busily talking as Reeves entered.

"No, Graham, I can't let you have that

lot at any such figure," he said, turning and nodding carelessly at Reeves. "How de do! How de do! Take a seat—be with you in a few minutes. No, it's worth a thousand dollars, if it's worth a cent," he went on to Frank, who was nearly suffocating with laughter.

At this moment the telephone bell rang, and the judge went to it.

"Hello! Sherman House? Oh, it's you, Billy. No. Seventeen? All sold, Billy—awfully sorry—I say I'm sorry, but the Standard Oil Company wanted the whole biz. What? Oh, three thousand for the unbroken lot. I don't know—put up a warehouse, I believe. I say—is Godfrey there? Godfrey! Graham has just offered seven-fifty for the lot on number sixteen—better sell—nine hundred, eh? All right. Good-by!"

The judge hung the receiver on its hooks, and turned to Graham. "I hate to sell the lot at that figure. It's worth more money. Can't I suit you with another lot?"

"No; I wanted that identical lot," said

Frank, gravely. "I don't want a lot on the north side at any price."

The bell rang again, and the judge said, "You'll excuse me, won't you?"

Reeves had a suspicion that they thought him a tenderfoot, so assumed the latest London accent for their benefit.

"Certainly. Don't allow me to intefeah with your business. Ai just dropped" —

Judge at the telephone — "Sherman House? All right. Hold on a minute. Graham, look up number fourteen there, will you? I think that's a corner lot."

Frank went to the book where the plots were kept.

"Yes, one lot."

"Say, Frank," said the judge in a low voice, "what's going on at the Sherman House? They's some nigger in the fence. Can't be they've got wind of the railroad deal" —

The bell rang sharply.

"Wait a minute, can't you? Hello! Yes, I can let you have one lot. Can't say now. Call me up again in a few minutes. Good-by! I'll just call up the

Major and see what's in the wind," the judge said to Frank, who was studying Reeves carefully.

"Hello! Gimme the *Spike* office. Hello! Major? Say, Major, what's the news from Hall? What! You don't say! Good! I'm onto their little scheme."

As the judge sat down to his desk to write, Reeves said with an affected drawl, "Business is rawther brisk, ai take it."

"Oh, pretty fair," the judge replied carelessly. "But I've some dandy bargains."

"Ai just dropped in to awsk if you could get me"—

"Certainly—get you anything," said the judge, rising and getting the book and placing it on Reeves' knees. "Now, there's a lot on nine that's dirt cheap at a thousand dollars. It's a jim dandy! Bound to be worth two thousand dollars before snow flies."

"You don't siy!" exclaimed Reeves.

"I do," replied the judge.

"What's going to maike it worth so much?"

"Why, the boom in this town. Look at

the lines of road—seven, and a new one being graded, will be ironed before snow flies. And then there's the plow factory, capital one hundred thousand dollars—and grist-mill"—

"And the twine factory," put in Frank.

"That's so," exclaimed the judge, with unusual enthusiasm. "One o' the biggest schemes in the North-west. Millions o' tons o' flax burned every year, millions o' pounds o' twine bought every year. Now a stock company has been formed—will put up works costing seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars"—

"Very intristing, indeed. But I fawn-cied you'd be ible to tell me abeout this timber-clime mattah. Ai bought a clime of a felleh a shawt time since, deon't you know, an' when ai saw it to-diy, it hadn't a tree in sight!"

Frank found this a splendid chance to explode in laughter, but the judge remained calm.

"A timber claim, my dear sir, is not a claim with trees on it, but a claim on which the government wants trees put."

"Yeou deon't sai!" stared Reeves.

"Oh, yes, that's just what I say."

"But the felleh said the timber would be immensely valuable."

"So it will, fifty years from now, when it has had a chance to grow," laughed Frank.

"Then, according to that, you think I'm done," said Reeves, with a kind of reproachful look at Frank.

"Done brown—no mistake."

Reeves looked mildly fierce.

"Oh, deah! How I should like to meet that felleh agine for one brief moment!"

"You wouldn't hurt him!"

"I'd punch his bloody head?"

"Oh, that would be cruel! You ought to keep your 'valley' on hand to protect you."

"What do you mean by that?"

"English, I take it?"

"But weon't yeou tell me heow you knew, please?"

"Each hair o' your head proclaims it," said the judge.

"Yeou deon't sai!"

"Oh, yes, I'd gamble on that twist in your tongue. Now, see me get you out of this scrape," he went on with a fine assumption of friendly concern. "You'd better invest right here in Boomtown. I've got a lot here that I've been saving for a friend of mine, but he's lately died, and that leaves the lot on my hands. It's worth a thousand dollars to-day, but I'll sell for seven-fifty. It's bound to go up to fifteen hundred."

"Very kind of you—but what's going to make it go up as you say?"

"Why, the boom on the town. The people coming in—the scarcity of land—see?"

"But there *isn't* a scarcity of land. Bai George! I never saw so much land in all my life—deon't yeou know? And yet you charge such prices. Ai thought this was a free-land stite."

"Oh, that's one of the things we print," said Frank gravely, "to bring people out here. It's free for so much—see?"

Reeves dropped his assumed character.

"Yes, I see! I see that and a good deal

more. I see that you are all a set o' boomers, and flourish at the expense of the real workers of this territory. You can't give me any points on that kind o' thing. I'm a single-tax man."

Frank leaped up with a shout—

"What! You! Lookin' as you do?"

"Looking as I do," responded Reeves, coolly. "See how my hair stands up? I've seen the cat."

Frank seized his hand in a transport of friendliness. (The judge took his hat and slipped out.) "So've I. Gimme y'r hand." They shook and kept shaking. "You look like a dude, but you've got the grip of a man. I don't know where you come from, but I know where you'll go to—thunder and blue mud! Why didn't y' say so before? Goin' to stop long in town?"

"Several days."

"Visitin' friends?"

"Yes—the Edwards family."

Frank gave a whistle of sudden intelligence. "Oh, I see. Certainly. You're that man from Boston!" Here he seized him by the hand again with a return of

fraternal good-will. "Success to yeh, comrade—she's a bonanza!"

"Thank you," smiled Reeves.

"Oh, I know! Prospected round there myself till I saw 'twant no use. Claim pre-empted. Case of monopoly. See? Say, looky here! Send your things right over to my house—not a word—got to be did. I keep open house to single-taxers"—

"Well, if you insist"—

"I do insist."

"Well, all right. I'll just ring up the Sherman House and have my valises sent right over to your house"—

As Reeves went to the telephone, Frank nearly smothered in laughter, but managed to say—

"I would, if I were you."

Reeves turned the crank, but no bell responded—turned twice or thrice—

"What do you call this thing?"

"A coffee-mill," shrieked Frank.

Reeves ground it once more—

"Well, so should I."

"Oh, let up on that," exploded Frank.
"That's only one o' the judge's little

schemes to rope in tenderfeet. But never mind—I'll send a boy around."

Reeves looked at the transmitter, then at Frank, wide-mouthed with laughter.

"Now look here! You don't mean to say that telephoning was all bogus?"

"That's what it was. There's a button under the desk there that rings the bell"—here he pushed the button.

Reeves sank into a chair exhausted.

"Well, for ways that are dark and tricks that are vain! The Western land-shark is peculiar."

"Almost equal to the stock-gamblers and Congressmen in the East," chipped in the Westerner. "Well, how goes everything in Boston anyway? By the way, I don't know your name—don't make any difference—a little handier, that's all"—

"Reeves—Walter Reeves, *Daily Events*."

"My name's Graham—Frank Graham. Now, don't worry about your things. I'll see that you have 'em. Old man, if I wasn't a married man, that girl of yours—but let that pass. I congratulate you—and her."

"Can you tell me how things are going with them?"

"Yes—they're going pretty bad, as they are with most American farmers."

"In what way?"

"In all ways."

"Are they in want?"

"Well, they're poor enough. But that girl! Well, she's the main-stay of the family. She's all that keeps 'em up. Old man, why don't you step in there an' give 'em all a lift—eh? Excuse—I can't help"—

"I wanted to, years ago—before they ever thought of coming West."

"And she objected?"

"She objected."

"Why?"

"Oh—a sort of—pride—a"—

"I see—obstinacy, we'd call it out here."

"No, it ain't that. Edwards is one of those men who'd die in the harness before he'd give up, and she's a good deal of the same spirit—she hates to give up."

"Well, all is—old man—if you don't

help, or the Lord don't give us a good rain soon, they'll go under the wheel, sure as shootin'."

"Did Edwards buy or"—

"Bought and mortgaged, of course. There wasn't any free land within forty miles of the railroad. Judge here has charge of the affairs of a banking establishment that holds, I suppose, five hundred mortgages in this country."

"By the way, didn't I see the judge's name signed to a defiant article directed at the Eastern press, denying the poverty of the West?"

"Yes, that was our Balser. All the names on that list were either bankers or land-holders."

Reeves grew bitter.

"With seventy per cent. of your farms mortgaged, those men have the nerve to send out a paper like that. I begin to think that you are the worst cursed part of our whole nation.

"Oh, not so bad as that—I'll come back East and study you some day and see—but here comes my wife to call me to dinner."

A very pretty girl, looking almost childish in her wide hat and simple calico dress, came to the door.

"Frank, the dinner is all drying up—it won't be fit to eat!"

"I'm sorry, for we're going to have some company. My wife, brother Reeves."

"Oh, Frank Graham!" scolded the disturbed wife. "How can you bring people home when I've nothing to eat!"

"Don't worry," said Frank, winking at Reeves. "I'll take a can of Boston baked beans under my arm—if he don't have his valise full."

As they went merrily off up the sidewalk, past the sleepy clerks under the awnings, Judge Balser came out of the Sherman House, with a genuine customer whom he had found in the bar-room. He gave a furtive look around the office as he came in—

"Oh, the quiet is natural just before the harvest. People are getting machinery out ready for harvest. We have it every year. That's all the better f'r you. That lot at seven hundred and fifty dollars is sure to go to a thousand by September.

III.

IT was hot in the town, it was frightful on the prairie, bare of trees as a desert. The eyes found no place to rest from the hot, brazen glare of everything—the grass, the grain, the sky. There was absolutely no fresh green thing to be seen, no cool glint of water, no pleasant shade—only a radiant, mocking, sinister sky, flecked with the white bodies of the gulls that rose and fell, swooped and circled in the blazing air. The farmers toiled at their scanty crops of hay, and eyed the sky with prayers and curses alternating on their lips. Every year at this same date those blighting winds had blown.

Bare on the immense plain stood the small unpainted wooden shanties, unshaded and unsheltered, the sun beating down upon them with the same merciless sever-

ity the mariners tell of in the tropic seas. Like a boat becalmed on a russet sea, each little hut parched and cracked and grew odorous in the terrific heat.

The wind was rising, but it had no moisture in it, no coolness; it was like the wind from a furnace. It appalled the stranger, and even to those familiar with it, it brought terror. As the men stopped in the fields and leaned on their forks and turned their throbbing faces to its sweep, it brought small relief.

Many men quit work, or failed to go out at all after dinner. The windows and doors of every shanty were open to allow the wind to pass through. In the shadow of the barn or hay-stack the fowls lay panting with open beaks, or sidled against the wind to the well to look for a drink of water to cool their parching throats.

The Edwards homestead looked like the rest—a small frame shanty, shelterless on a slight swell, beaten upon by the noon-day sun. It was composed of two parts, the upright being sixteen by twenty-four, and a story and a half high, while at the

side, serving as a kitchen, was a box-like shanty which had been their home for the first eighteen months. It was already gray with the weather.

Surrounding the house were signs of a garden, but plants and shrubs withered and dry pained the eye with their evident suffering. A low stable and a few sheds stood back of the house. Not a tree or shrub tall enough to hide a child was in sight.

At about two o'clock a young woman came out of the house and took a seat in the scanty shade of the house, beside a small stand, and began sewing. As she worked, she looked often across the prairie toward the distant Boomtown—weird and insubstantial in the mist.

It was Alice Edwards, worn and weary, and looking ten years older. She was always womanly, but now she was grave and almost stern. She was plainly looking for some one, and her eyes scanned the prairie with painful intentness. A girlish voice was to be heard, singing to the accompaniment of a piano, a rhythmical

negro melody. It ceased at length and Linnie came out.

"My goodness! Ain't it hot? I hope mother won't try to come home till after supper. It's ninety-eight in the shade. Do you suppose he got in last night?"

"I don't know," replied Alice wearily. "I've looked so long across this endless prairie that my eyes ache. Come and look," she said, rising. "Is there a team coming? Don't that look like a carriage—there? Just rising that swell by Peterson's house?"

Linnie looked leisurely and critically from under her hand.

"Yup—a top-buggy, sure."

"Oh, if it shouldn't be Walter, Linnie, I should sink with disappointment. See how plain the team can be seen now—I know it is Walter. His letter said he'd get in yesterday. How silently and how swiftly it comes! Oh, the plain!" she cried with a voice of utter weariness. "It's so lonesome! There is no place so dreary to wait and watch in! It is so piti-

less, so beautiful—but so impassive—like a dead sea. It crushes me.”

“I’m sick of it, too. It’s almost as bad as living in Pleasant Street, ain’t it?”

“Almost—not quite.”

“I don’t know,” said Linnie musingly. “I wisht I could hear the little German band that used to play down by McBreen’s saloon on the corner, an’ see the circus parades, an’ the boys’ regiment. A monkey and a hand-organ would be just gorgeous out here. Oh, I’m sick an’ tired of the hot, lonesome prairie—I wish that team’d hurry up,” she grumbled, looking away. “I don’t know which I’d ruther die of—lonesomeness, ’r starve to death in a crowd.”

Alice was not listening; her hands had fallen to her lap. “I think it must be Walter—he’s at the second moggason now.”

“What ye goin’ t’ do if ’tis him?”

“Oh, I don’t know—I don’t know!”

“I know what I’d do. I wish I had a Boston editor that wanted to marry me. You bet I’d let him.”

"Linnie, what do you mean?"

"Mean what I say," said Linnie sturdily. "I'd ruther die an old maid in Boston than have forty husbands out here," she concluded with much decision.

Alice rose and walked about uneasily. She was tense with excitement, and her hands clasped and unclasped themselves constantly.

"I wish I knew"—

"I wish I did—but I don't," put in the practical Linnie. "He's a drivin' f'r all in sight, whoever he is. He's gettin' there! I hope he won't stay to supper, whoever he is," she added after a pause. "It's too hot for company. It's awful on the wheat. Father's just about crazy. See him down there? He don't do nothin' else but walk around and look at that wheat."

Alice started to go in, but Linnie stopped her by saying:

"Ain't yeh goin' to wait an' see who 'tis?"

"No, I must go in; I can't stand here and stare at him as he comes. I—I"—

"Well, I can. I'm goin' to stay right

here and see who it is. Beaux are too scarce these times to lose sight 'o one. It may be Frank Graham. Say, Allie, here comes poppa after a jug o' water."

Alice turned with a new concern in her face. "Oh, don't say anything to him about Walter's coming, will you, dear? I don't want to trouble him if I can help it. And I want to see Walter alone, if possible."

"All right!" nodded Linnie, with her eyes on the approaching carriage.

Jason Edwards came in with a water-jug in his hands, and proceeded to fill it from the water bucket which Linnie raised from the well.

"How's the hayin' to-day, poppa."

"Turrible hot."

"Poor poppa! Why don't you come an' sit down here in the shade?"

Edwards took off his torn straw hat and wiped his face with his sleeve. He was much grayer, and was bent and lame.

"They ain't no rest f'r me. If I should set around in the shade, my girl wouldn't have any home when winter came. Rain

'r shine, wet 'r dry, I've got to keep movin'.
Where's mother?"

"Over to Mrs. Elliott's."

"Where's Allie?"

"She's in the house layin' down. She don't seem very well to-day."

Edwards sighed deeply. "Poor girl! She ought 'o stayed in Boston; but it 'ud 'a' killed mother an' me. I don't see how we could 'a' pulled through without her."

He took up his jug to go, and scanned the horizon closely. He was pathetic almost to the point of being tragic as he stood there. His coarse shirt was open at the throat, his whiskers, much whitened, were wet with sweat. His face was flushed in a way that would have startled an experienced eye. His hand trembled with fatigue, and his poor, patient eyes were dim with sweat.

The girl saw a little of the infinite pathos in his face and figure, and she went up to him.

"Poor dear old poppa! How hard you work! I wish I was a boy so I could help you."

Edwards felt the comfort in her voice, and turned and put his arm over her shoulder, pressing her face to his side.

"You can help me more this way," he said. "Poor little sweetheart, growin' up here without schoolin', without company—oh, it's awful!"

"Never mind, poppa—never mind. It ain't so bad. Allie teaches me, and I go to school summer-terms, anyway."

Edwards looked at the sky. "Seems as if it gets hotter every minute."

"Don't work too hard—you'll get a sun-stroke," warned Linnie.

"If it would only rain," he groaned. "But it won't. They ain't no rain left in the sky. Oh, God! What can I do!"

Linnie burst out in tears as he staggered rather than walked off toward the field—but as she heard the trample of hoofs, her face cleared, and she cried—

"Allie, Allie! It is Walter. No other man would ever wear a plug-hat out in this wind."

Then she seated herself coolly on the door-step and awaited his approach, with

her chin in her hands and her eyes fixed on him.

Reeves drove up to the post near the well, and leaped out. After hitching one of the horses with trembling hands, he came up the slope toward the door.

"Is Miss Edwards?"—

Alice came to the door. For a moment they looked into each other's faces, as if to read all intervening history, then Reeves opened his arms.

"Alice!" he cried.

And she came to his arms. After a moment's silence, Reeves raised her face.

"What! Crying? I thought you'd laugh—oh, it's your guilty conscience!"

Then more gravely, as he saw the change in her —

"My sweetheart—that face is sad, tired—life out here is killing you."

Alice tried to smile.

"Oh, no; we women cry when we're pleased—and"—

"Laugh when you're angry"—

"Oh, Walter—I've looked forward so long to seeing you! I've watched the road

for days and days, and counted the hours—it was so lonely here!”

“Your letters didn’t read so,” said Walter quizzically, as he led her to the chair. “They were cold and formal enough, I can tell you that.”

“I didn’t dare write—my real self.”

“Why not?”

“Oh, because—because I was afraid”—

“Afraid I’d come and get you—eh?”

“Don’t ask me to explain now—tell me all about yourself; but first let me get you a glass of lemonade, you must be thirsty.”

Reeves gazed at her fondly.

“Yes—thirsty for the sight of you.”

Alice, flushed and smiling, went into the house, calling Linnie, who had promptly and considerably disappeared. Reeves got up and walked about, eying the plain keenly.

“So this is the reality of the dream! This is the ‘homestead in the Golden West, embowered in trees, beside the purling brook!’ A shanty on a barren plain, hot and lone as a desert. My God! What a

place for her—my beautiful girl—for anybody's girl! A wide-walled grave, arched by a mocking, sinister sky"—

Alice entered with a glass of lemonade, and as he took it he said, "In a land like this the sight of water must mean as it does with the Arabs—the highest hospitality."

Reeves looked older. Gray had come into his hair at the temples, and his sunny smile was less frequent. Alice studied him with hungry eyes. "Oh, I'm so glad to see you, I can't say"—

"Don't try," interrupted he, putting his arm about her. "I'll say enough for two. What in the world is that child doing with my team?" he exclaimed, looking over the well-curb. "She's unhitching them! She'll have a runaway"—

He ran down to where Linnie was at work preparing to put the horses in the barn.

Alice was thinking distractedly. "How can I let him go again! But I must, I must. I can't leave my father now."

Walter came back with Linnie on his arm.

"Why, you're a regular little horse-jockey, ain't you?"

Linnie laughed.

"That's nothin'! Allie and I hitch up and drive the plow-teams, and I drive the mower and reaper, don't I, Allie?"

"Do you do that?" asked Reeves in grave surprise. "With this hand?" he added, taking her hand and stroking it.

"You don't seem to mind about my hand," pouted Linnie, as she entered the house. "I don't count."

"Not yet," smiled Reeves. Then turning to Alice, he said, as if he could not believe it—

"And you live in that den?"

"Yes," said Alice simply, "with my people."

"All through your horrible weather?"

"Yes, and there are the days when it seems like a palace. Days and days we can't leave the house. Last winter it seemed as if the snow would never rest."

Reeves was horrified. "What a prison! And yet I saw a dozen not so good as I

came along the road. With all this boundless space you are living as closely as in your rooms on Pleasant Street."

"We lived in that shanty-part a year and a half."

"And this is the free and glorious West!" cried Reeves, lifting his head. "And you have lived all these years in that hole rather than with me in a home! Oh, it makes me wild to think of it!"

"There was no other way," replied Alice simply. "They couldn't live without me. My teaching here has kept us in groceries—and there have been days and weeks when father was too lame to take care of the cattle, and I have done it."

Reeves seized her hands.

"Don't tell me any more—I'll rage—I'll swear—I can't stand it!"

"We must bear it."

"Bear it! I won't bear it. I'll expose the whole infernal country in a four-column editorial. I'll smash the next boomer that says land to me—free land! If this is free land, what in the devil"—

"Sh!" interposed Alice, putting her

hand over his mouth—but he freed himself and went on—

“If this is free land, what in the devil’s name is paying for land? You and these families around you have purchased these bare and miserable acres with all that makes life worth living.”

“I know it, but it only makes it worse to know it.”

“Well, forget it, then,” said Reeves, as he took her hands. “For you know what I’m here for. I’ve come to take you out of it—hush, now! Let me go on. I’ve let you spoil the best years of our lives, and you sha’n’t spoil any more.”

He held her fast as she struggled to free herself.

“I can’t—I can’t—I”—

“You must,” said Reeves, almost angrily. “I’m master of you now.”

She ceased struggling, but there was a look in her eyes that freed her hands.

“You are not,” she cried with a gesture of repulsion. “You go too far”—

“Alice, listen!” entreated Reeves. “I didn’t mean that—forgive me”—

"You did—you meant it. It was the man's tone. Listen to me."

"I will listen when you talk sense," Reeves impetuously went on. "I've come for you—I won't be put off. If you refuse"—

"Suppose I do—what then?" asked Alice in fine scorn.

"Then we never see each other again."

Alice was shaken by his tone, which was one of deadly earnestness.

"There is a limit to my patience, Alice. Be careful how you answer."

"You are the one to be careful. You are unjust. Am I here to please myself? You are cruel, harsh, unfeeling"—

"Alice—Alice!"

"It is true. Do my sufferings count for nothing—my sacrifices? I see and feel all that you do, but I owe something to my parents. I can't leave them here, and I won't leave them—now."

"What good has your sacrifice done?"

"See these hands," she went on, impetuously. "You don't know half. I help keep this home in bread. I plow, I milk

the cows—every hand is needed on the American farm. There's no law against child-labor or woman-labor here. But I could bear all this, if you did not sneer—if you appreciated what I am doing."

(Reeves bowed his head under the rebuke.)

"Walter—I didn't expect that from you!"

When Reeves spoke again, it was in a changed voice—all the anger gone out of it. He was almost awed by her face and voice.

"I don't mean to be hard—but you forget my side of it all. I've waited five years—and now you say wait one year more. Another year and we may be dead. A railway accident" she started, "a stray bullet on the street, and I'm cheated. Oh, Alice, Alice," he pleaded, "don't send me back with empty hands—don't do it. I can't bear it—you are sacrificing us both."

"We must wait—there is no other way." She was almost ready to give up, but he did not see it.

"Then I know you care nothing for

me," cried Reeves, leaping up in despairing rage. "If you did you couldn't be so hard."

"Walter—you have—hurt me!" she said, shrinking as if from a blow.

"No—no; I don't mean that—don't mind me—but you must not persist in staying here. It is the law of life for daughters to leave their parents."

Alice shook her head, her steady eyes looking above his head. "It is not the law of my life. The walls of the beautiful home you offer me couldn't shut out the memory of the sorrow and loneliness of this home."

"Think—consider!" he pleaded.

"Think!" she cried with a sudden and thrilling passion. "Think! I have thought till my brain whirled. In the awful silence of the prairie one thinks till he goes mad. While I saw my father toiling in the burning fields, my sister growing up in ignorance, I've thought and thought—I've tried to understand my duty"—

"Let me help you, dear," he said, tenderly, approaching her. "Let me put your father on his feet"—

"I knew you'd say that," said Alice, with great love in her face; "but father wouldn't consent. He never can consent to be a burden on your charity—he's too proud. As long as he can earn enough to shelter and feed us, he never'll submit to be helped. When he bends he'll break. He needs money, but he needs me more than he needs money. Mother is no comfort to him now, and Linnie is only a child. No, Walter," she ended, shaking her head firmly, "there is no present help for it, as I can see. Things may change, but you must go back to your splendid life in the city, and I must fight my battle here." She raised her hand to silence him—"It is useless, cruel to press me further. I have decided once for all."

"I can't submit to this folly!"

"Walter, you must!"

She faced him with a look of stern and gloomy determination on her face. They stood face to face in a silent battle of wills. She, poor, morbid, unhappy girl, and he indignant, hurt and puzzled—his strength and experience of no value to him.

There was no yielding in her steady eyes, and he turned with a sudden anger. She relaxed and her eyes closed; but as he turned she raised her head and resumed her implacable mood. He hesitated a moment, bowed and walked away.

She stood gazing at him till he entered his carriage, and drove rapidly away. Then she sank slowly into her chair and buried her face in her arms.

IV.

AT four o'clock the wind was still blowing warm from the South, but here and there were to be seen, lying far down around the horizon snowy thunder-heads rising out of the sea of pink mist in which they swam. The wind was more fitful, too, and blew as if weary. The crickets, mainly silent in the middle of the day, were singing, and the grasshoppers, snapping and buzzing, rose and fell in the grass like flakes of gold.

The gulls still swooped and circled in the wind, but they were beginning to move northward toward the lake, where they rested at night. The wheat, as the sun fell less powerfully upon it and as the wind stirred it less, looked greener and less withered—though it was only in appearance. The leaves of the corn rolled

together by the dry wind and beaten into strips against each other, hung like battle-flags after the conflict is over.

Overhead a keen eye could see the mist from the South, faint, almost imperceptible, meeting the northern current and being turned back by it. This double motion was a dangerous sign, and many of the men who saw it shook their heads, and prophesied great things to come before night. As the wind ceased, the heat to these workers seemed more oppressive than before.

Mrs. Edwards had just returned from her visit. Elliott, who was out in the road talking with a neighbor, had brought her home. Alice was seated at the little table—one arm flung wearily across it, and her pale face wearing a look of sorrow that was almost despair. Linnie was washing some potatoes in a pan.

"Linnie, girl, did you shut up the little turkies, as I told y' to?"

"Yes, ma—but you needn't think it's goin' to rain. I believe as father does, that it can't rain."

"Where is he?"

"Putting up hay over there—don't you see him?"

Mrs. Edwards sighed. "Well! I guess you'd better start a fire."

"Oh, it's too hot to start a fire. Let's eat bread and milk to-night!"

"No; your pa ought to have a good supper to-night. He haint had much appetite lately."

Alice turned to her mother.

"Mother—Linnie—don't tell father anything about Walter's being here—please! Poor poppa! He has all he can bear now. I don't want to burden him with my troubles."

As Linnie went into the house, Mrs. Edwards said, with a peculiar inflection of placid sorrow—

"I know what he wanted."

"Yes, he wanted me. He came expecting me to return with him."

"Poor child! I wish you could go."

"And leave you here alone!" cried Alice, almost fiercely. "Alone, now! And Linnie needing me more every day. I'm

not quite so selfish as that. But I don't see why life should be one relentless, horrible struggle."

"I don't see how we'd git along—why didn't he stay an' see father?"

"Because I sent him away. I couldn't hold out much longer. Oh, mother, mother!" cried the suffering girl, throwing herself before her mother's feet and burying her face in the faithful lap, "did I do right?"

"I'm afraid not, Allie!" the mother replied, stroking her hair, while the tears fell upon it. "I'm afraid you ought 'o gone."

"And, oh, mother, I had to send him away angry, without a good-by. I didn't dare to be tender to him, I was so weak. Oh, will the night of our poverty never lift?"

"I suppose it's the Lord's will."

"I don't," said Alice, raising her tear-stained face. "I don't. The Lord is good, men are bad. He never intended that his creatures should suffer hunger and cold."

Mrs. Edwards was shocked.

"Allie, how can you talk so!"

"We are not living here because He requires it of us," the girl went on bitterly, "but because men push us out."

"There, there, dear! Don't take on so," said Mrs. Edwards soothingly. As she rose to go in, a young man's voice, clear and joyous, could be heard far out on the prairie—

"The West, the West, the beautiful West,
I can see thee in my dreams;
From a far-off soil my feet have pressed
I could see thy laughing streams."

1

"He doesn't mean our West," said Alice bitterly, as Elliott came up to the well, joking with Linnie and Mrs. Edwards. He took a sip of water, tasted it with care, cocked his head on one side, and at last said gravely—

"I don't see anything special in this water. But they tell me young fellers go four miles out of their way to get a taste of it."

"Now what you drivin' at—tell me," demanded Linnie.

"I suppose they can't find the dipper—obliged to call f'r a glass. Oh, I'm on to all these little dodges! Was young myself"—

"When?" inquired Linnie, as he stopped to laugh.

"Oh, way back in the dark ages, when I was on earth the first time. By the way, Mrs. Edwards, you'd better think twice about that offer o' mine on the 'spark arrester'. It won't be six months till you'll be overrun with sparks."

"What in the world you talkin' about?" said Linnie, coming nearer him.

"Spark arrester—prevents sparks from comin' out—indispensable to all mothers of girls." He roared till he was as red as a beet. He turned suddenly to Mrs. Edwards—"Which 'd you ruther do, die or go a-fishing?"

"Go fishing. Oh, I long for fish," said Mrs. Edwards, with more of real emotion than she had shown in many a serious crisis. "I never lived before where there

wasn't fish—and lobster" (she called it *lobsteh*, of course). "I'd give anything for a good fresh lobster!"

"Lobster!" exclaimed Elliott, who was inland born; "I'd as soon eat a t'rant'la."

Alice, who had paid little attention to Elliott, put on her hat and said, "I'll go call father to supper," and moved off toward the field.

Elliott looked down the road. "Hello! Who's this? Some thirsty souls, I guess. I begin to see what Frank means when he says all the trails on the prairie lead to Jason Edwards'. 'Strike a trail anywhere,' he says, 'and follow it, it'll bring you to Edwards' well.'"

A carriage drove slowly up the road and turned in toward the well. It was Frank Graham and Judge Balser. Frank was leaning back in the carriage, his coat off, his feet on the dashboard. He pulled up, and pointing dramatically, sang—

"Don't y' see de dark cloud
Risin' ober yonder?
Don't y' tink wese goin' to hab a rain?
Oh, yes, as sure as shootin',

See the lightnin' scootin',
Sartin sure wese goin' to hab a rain."

As he closed in a conversational voice like a negro minstrel, he leaped out and came forward, making a prodigious start at seeing Elliott.

"Ett two, Brooty! Elliott, I'm pained—I truly am! A man of your weight in the community. How de do, folkses—Miss Linnie, will you bring me a glass?"

"Same old trick!" yelled Elliott, screaming with laughter. "There's the dipper in the bucket."

"Why, so it is!" cried Graham in vast astonishment. "Have a drink, Judge—if you dare!"

As the judge was drinking, Alice came back for the purpose of speaking to the judge, and while the others were talking and laughing at the well, she drew him aside.

"I'd like to speak with you."

"Desire is mutual," responded the judge, with elaborate courtesy.

"Judge, can't you be easy on father?"

Can't you let the mortgage run? I'm afraid he'll go crazy with the worry—the crops are so bad. Oh, if you only would” —

The judge replied quickly —

“I should be most happy, Miss Edwards, but you see I've nothing to do with it. I'm merely the agent of the syndicate. Beside, there are so many others in the same box, and if I let one off, they'd all” —

“Then take the land!” cried Alice, despairingly. “Don't delude us with the idea of ownership where we're only tenants.”

“But we don't want the land,” explained the judge. “All we want is the interest. We've got more land than we know what to do with.”

He had made it too plain. The girl's face lifted, lit by a bitter indignant smile —

“I see! It's cheaper to let us think we own the land than it is to pay us wages. You're right—your system is perfect—and heartless. It means death to us and all like us!” she said, as the whole truth came upon her. “We'll be homeless again.”

She rushed away blindly, escaping the judge's bland smile.

"Now what's the meaning of that, I wonder," Frank Graham said to himself, as he saw Alice go away. Elliott and Linnie were scuffling.

"Go away and sit down!"

"Oh, ain't we savage! What a fuss we make about an arm about our waist, don't we?"

"Elliott," said Frank severely, "such conduct is unseemly. Come, Judge, you infernal old land-shark, let us be getting home before the lightning strikes you and injures me. Elliott, come along home."

After they had all gone, Mrs. Edwards and Linnie began setting the table outside, in the shadow of the house—it was cooler and pleasanter. At last Mrs. Edwards said—

"Well, there! We're most ready. Can you see y'r pa comin'?"

"Yes, here he comes with Alice."

"Well, set the tea on an' see if the p'tatoes are done."

Edwards had a handful of wheat in his

hands, which he had pulled up by the roots. It was dry and whitish-yellow in color—blighted, in short. Alice was walking by his side, trying to cheer him up.

“It’s going to rain, father, I know it is. See the clouds gathering over there? You’ll hear the thunder-giant begin to walk pretty soon.”

“Rain! It can’t rain now,” replied Edwards, with a tone of despairing bitterness that was terrible to hear. “Them clouds’ll pass right by, jest’s they’ve all done f’r the last four weeks. See that wheat swash like water! You wouldn’t think to see it from here that it’s dry as dust, but it is. Rain! A man might pray and pull till his eyes dropped out, an’ he couldn’t draw one cloud an inch out of the way. We might jest as well give it up,” he ended, flinging the handful of wheat to the ground.

“Don’t talk so, father, please don’t. It hurts us. Mother, talk to him—cheer him up,” she appealed to Mrs. Edwards.

But Mrs. Edwards had reached that stage of dumb patience which is near to

insensibility, and her comfort was mainly physical.

"Can't you eat sumpthin', Jason? Set up an' have some tea. Linnie, pour him a cup o' tea."

"Don't give up," pleaded Alice. "Let's fight as long as we can."

"It ain't no use, Allie, m' girl. Everything's against us"

"But if the rain comes now"—

"It can't save it. See them white spots out there?"

"Yes, what does it mean?" asked Alice, looking away with strained and tearful gaze.

"It means blight. It means that every stalk is like them"—he put his foot on the scattered straws he had thrown down. "It means failure."

"Failure! Is there no hope?"

"None—that I can see. We're squeezed out ag'in. Squeezed out of the city, and now we're squeezed out of a country of free land—I'm just about ready to quit."

"I wish I could do something to help you. It scares me to have you fail—you've been so brave."

"It scares me to think of my family. There's a quarter section of wheat dry enough to burn. A field of empty heads—empty as my hands when they should be as heavy as my head feels. Oh, I can't stand it. It'll make me crazy!"

He rose and walked to and fro in agony, till Mrs. Edwards came and laid her hand on his arm. "Come, Jason, git ready f'r supper."

"Oh, I can't eat," he burst out. "I don't feel as if I could eat another mouthful as long as I live."

"Try to eat—for my sake—poppa," she said, using the old childish name. Edwards paused, sat down at the table, but did not eat.

"It ain't no use at all, Jennie, children. I've got to the end of my rope. I've lost my last chance—the great free West! Free to starve in. I've strained ev'ry muscle to pay f'r my free land, but when I had a crop it wasn't worth anything, and now there ain't enough on the whole farm to pay interest on the mortgage, say nothin' of other debts and expenses."

Alice went to him, soothing him, caressing his gray hair. He went on, an infinite pathos in his voice and in the droop of his head.

"My life is a failure—I don't know why. Don't seem 's if it was my fault. I know it ain't yours, mother. Fifty years of work—an' here we be! I've worked every well day of my life since I was ten years old; we've worked early and late, an' pinched an' saved. I never was a drinker, we ain't had the necessities of life—rent went up an' fuel went up, an' wages went down—an' here we are."

Faint, far away was heard the boom of thunder—

"Hark!" called Linnie, leaping up and clapping her hands—"It's going to rain!" She ran to the corner of the house to see, and cried again, "It's going to rain, sure!"

"The world has been jest a place to work in," Edwards went on in the same bitter tone, "an' now I'm wore out."

"Can't we sell an' go back?" asked his wife eagerly.

"Sell! We ain't got nothin' to sell;

an' if we had, who'd buy it in this God-forsaken country. Jest look at it—here we've worked"—

Again the thunder broke in on his voice, unmistakably nearer. The wind had died down. Mrs. Edwards rose, like the careful housewife she was—

"It's goin' to rain—I must go an' see that the windows are shet."

The sun was already veiled by the ragged edges of the rushing cloud—wide, horizon-grasping and menacing. As the thunder broke out at shorter intervals, Edwards rose and joined Alice, who was looking anxiously at the approach of the storm, whose foot-falls shook the earth. A shadow already lay across the prairie, deepening swiftly.

On came the wind-driven mass, preceded by a colossal dust-colored roll of vapor, which stretched like a looped scarf from east to west across the blue-black cloud behind. It tumbled and twisted as it came, trailing a dense shadow, and the lightning flamed in branching streams from it, and dust and leaves caught up from the plain

beneath kept pace with it. Yet it was perfectly breathless where the watchers stood. An ominous hush, hot and full of growing gray shadow.

"Oh, father, see!" said Alice, pointing. A vast swirl had appeared in the clouds beneath the scarf-like wind-wrack, a vortex from which shone a greenish light. This light grew till it looked like a gigantic sinister eye. An instant more, and a long, silvery-white veil seemed to drop from it, and spreading as it fell, trailed along the earth.

Alice was fascinated with the majesty of the scene—the wide plain, the boom of thunder, the rolling and spreading of the clouds, and the dazzling lightning's spangling thrust. But Edwards, with a darkening face and closed lip, gazed only at the marvelous beauty of that strange veil that streamed down from the cloud. It came drifting along the plain with incredible speed, shimmering like snow. A hissing, roaring sound now grew upon the ear, the wheat was trampled by the coming storm. Edwards comprehended it now—he turned to his family, and cried hoarsely—

“In with yeh!

Mrs. Edwards and Linnie huddled in the doorway, waiting for Alice and her father.

Edwards, with set and sullen face, made livid by the lightning's glare, lifted his hand, and half groaned, half imprecated—

“Hail! by the livin' God!”

The next moment, before he could turn to Alice, the storm-wind rushed upon them, carrying away the roof of the kitchen and dashing out every window, filling the room with floods of water and rebounding hailstones. In the deafening, distracting tumult, Linnie and her mother saw Edwards put his hand to his head and sink slowly to the ground, with Alice clinging to him.

V.

A LICE never could tell just how she dragged her father into the house, out she must have done it alone, for her mother and Linnie were confused and weak with fear. Somehow, in the midst of that horrible crackling roar, in the midst of the incessant glare of the lightning, while the wind and hail dashed out the window-panes and flooded the floor with water, she dragged the unconscious man across the sill and closed the door.

It seemed hours to her as she sat there drenched and white, looking down at the gray head dabbled in the water, as if it were blood, while she rubbed the cold hands and temples.

The wind tore through the house, stripping the curtains from the windows, and

the pictures and little ornaments from the walls, littering the floor with broken glass. It seemed as if the roof would be torn from their heads, and all be left naked to the storm. Mrs. Edwards and Linnie cowered, stunned and helpless, in the corner, while the water flooded the room, and hail stormed on the roof.

She could hear the sobbing of the half-crazed child on the bed, the dim, gray light lit by flashes of blue flame, showed her Mrs. Edwards with Linnie in her arms, staring wildly at the open window. She seemed dumb with the stress of her horror. Alice was alone with her father, who seemed to be dying, or dead.

At last the roar changed its key; from being sharp, harsh, it sank to a deeper, softer note, as the hail gave place to rain, and then for a quarter of an hour the rain fell so fast the air was a solid cataract of water. In turn, this died out, and the thunder went bellowing off to the East.

"Mother—Linnie—the storm is over." Alice shook her mother by the shoulder, as if she were asleep.

"Oh, he's dead — I know he is," she said, in utter depth of passionless despair.

"No, he isn't. Linnie, you must run to Mr. Elliot's, quick."

She roused Linnie and started her out into the slackening drizzle, but Mrs. Edwards was of no use to her. She still sat in that dazed and helpless way, gazing at the desolation around her. Edwards lay in a sort of coma, breathing heavily, but curiously like sleep.

The sky lightened. In the west a crescent of sky, flaming as burnished copper, told of a fair sky beyond. Its light seemed a bitter mockery to the girl, kneeling beside her father in a desolated home.

In thirty minutes the storm was over, and the chickens were paddling about in the pools of water here and there in the hollows, and caw-cawing gaily. The plain looked deliciously cool and moist, the lark's clear piping was heard in a kind of thanksgiving note, and only a practised eye could see the terrible effect of the hailstorm on the wheat.

Where it had stood tall and yellow and hot an hour ago, it now lay broken, beaten to the ground, wet, tangled and twisted into knots. It was mangled beyond any possible recovery; escaping the drouth, it was now trampled into the muddy earth.

VI.

REEVES rode away across the prairie in a turmoil of anger and sorrow. He felt wronged and cheated. He drove furiously toward the town, intending to take the train, but as he rode he thought, and thinking, softened. That sweet face, the haunting pathos of those work-calloused hands, those sad eyes, came over him, making him shudder and groan.

The team fell into a walk, his head sank low as he went over the whole matter. Over him the wide blue clouds rose unseen, and far-off lightning flashed silently along the vast blue-black mass of vapor in the west. He saw nothing outside. He was going over the interview.

How pitiful it all seemed now! He had

gone to her with such expectation of success. She loved him so, she could not conceal that, and yet her duty to her father and sister were insuperable barriers. His joy and buoyancy of greeting had a terrible mockery now, as he remembered them.

He thought of his own father, a hard-working carpenter. Would he have gone to live on his son-in-law as long as he had an arm to swing or a leg to stalk about on? No! He saw clearly now the feeling of Edwards, who still hoped against hope; his soldierly pride not permitting him to go to the hospital or acknowledge defeat.

He was roused by a peal of thunder, and turning, saw that terrible vortex of clouds moving down upon him. With a sudden determination, he turned his horses and drove rapidly back toward the Edwards claim. He must see her and ask her forgiveness for his anger, and—yes, promise to give up his Boston life for her life.

“Anything, anything for her!” he said. But the storm drove him into Elliott’s yard, and as he turned into an open shed

and hitched his team, Frank Graham came dashing out of the house.

"Git inside, quick! It's goin' to rain an' blow great shakes!"

As they ran to the house, they saw Elliott putting boards up before the windows.

"What's that for?" asked Reeves.

"Hail," said Frank briefly. "See?" He pointed out of the door at the back, and as Reeves looked, the dash of hail crashed on the roof, and for the next twenty minutes conversation was impossible.

Mrs. Elliott, a tall woman with a thin, melancholy face, moved about in the darkness, lighting a lamp. Elliott laughed silently—or at least, his laugh was not heard. The judge smoked calmly, Frank and Reeves stood at the eastern window, looking out at the cataract of water and the leaping hail.

Elliott came up at last, and shouted in the ear of Frank, "This knocks the wheat galley west," and carried it off as if it were all a great joke. As they all stood there, a box, barrels and a tin boiler, together

with pieces of boards and other light articles, were carried by, and disappeared in the gray flood.

Occasionally a lightning flash laid the ground bare to the sight, the grass showing flat as if rolled, the water drifting before the wind, the leaping globes of ice forming a terrifying vista to be lost a moment later in the gray gloom.

At last, as the rain began to cease and the roar of the hail to die out, Elliott said—

“If this don’t lay some o’ these shanties out flatter ’n a hoe-cake, I miss my guess.”

“Is there any danger to Edwards’ house?” Reeves asked anxiously.

“No, I guess not. It’s built pretty solid. Still, you can’t tell, these cyclones are so damned curious. I’ve seen a house blowed clear out o’ sight, and a hay-stack right near by scarcely touched. There! I can see the house now. It’s all right, as far as I can see. Looks ’s if the winders was out, that’s all. If they didn’t put something up before ’m, they are, you can bet high on that.”

Reeves was now so uneasy that he paced the room, waiting for the rain to cease. His fears grew. It seemed so brutal in him to have left Alice at such a time, and he was ready to reproach himself with criminal neglect.

"There's somebody comin' down the road—looks like a girl," said Elliott at the window.

"It is a girl," said Frank. "It's Linnie running like a deer. Something's up, sure's shootin'."

He rushed out into the road. The rain had nearly ceased, and the girl could be plainly seen.

"Here, Reeves, jump in! We'll meet her!"

"I'm with you," said Reeves, seizing the horses by the heads and backing them out of the shed. By the time they had wheeled them into the road Linnie, white, breathless, horrified, came flying into the yard.

"Oh, come quick! The house is blown down and poppa's killed. Get the doctor, quick!"

"Judge, bring the doctor," said Frank,

feeling the complete truth of the story told by Linnie's face.

"Git in here," he called to the girl. Reeves reached down and drew her in, and in an instant they had whirled into the road, driving at a tearing run toward the shanty a mile away.

Linnie lay in Reeves' arms, too exhausted to speak, her bright eyes turned now on the flying horses, and now on the face of the driver.

"Is Alice hurt?"

"No—she's all—right—it's poppa."

"The house seems to be standing," Frank said.

"It's the other part—the windows are all out," Linnie answered.

"See that grain," said Frank, nodding his head over his shoulder. "Look's like a crop, don't it? A few more like that 'll raise a crop o' suicides."

As they dashed up to the door of the upright, they saw the yard littered with fragments of straw, shavings, boards, furniture, and through the door Reeves saw Alice bending over her father.

She uttered a word of joy as she saw him. Then, as she looked around the room and back to the prostrate figure before her, she said with a terrible bitterness—

“See what God has done!”

Reeves lifted the senseless old man to a place on the bed, and fell to chafing his hands and feet.

“He can’t stay here—the bed is wet. The stove is filled with water, an’ pipe blown down,” said Frank. “There ain’t any room for him at Elliott’s. There’s nothing to do but take him down to my house. Wrap him in warm, dry quilts.”

“Help me get his wet clothes off,” said Reeves. “Alice, are there any dry clothes in the house?”

As they worked, they discussed the best thing to do. Mrs. Edwards had recovered a little, but still wore a dull and dazed look, and offered little help. Elliott came rushing over, and offered his house, of course, but Reeves said—

“If he must be moved a mile, we may as well take him to Graham’s. We’ll meet the doctor quicker.”

"He may die on the way," Alice cried in an agony of fear.

"I don't think so. His pulse is slow, but regular. It's a sort of coma—I've seen something like it before. I don't think it is dangerous."

The sun was just setting, as Reeves and Alice drove slowly off down the road, having in the open carriage the death-like presence of Jason Edwards. Alice sat beside her father, watching for signs of life, fearing each moment to see the shadow of death on the rigid face.

That ride they will never forget. The deadly white face of the wronged and cheated man looking toward the sky—the poor, lax hands falling empty—the glory of the sunset, the piping of the cheerful lark, the trill of the cricket, and the smell of the moist and tangled wheat.

Then came the curious faces of the neighbors, the falling dusk of evening, and the flower-like stars opening in the solemnity of the windless sky. Then came the light of the town into view, and the journey was nearly done, and the two young spirits in

the stress of this terrible moment, gazing at each other, had small need of words. They seemed able to read each other's souls. There was reliance, trust in her eyes, and comfort in his presence, and strength and forbearance in the eyes of Reeves.

Once he lifted one of the empty hands, so calloused and cracked and lumpish with toil.

"Poor hands," he said, and for the first time since the coming of the storm, the girl wept freely. Once she asked him how he came to be so near, and he told her, and said, "I was coming back to ask forgiveness for my brutal anger."

She shook her head and looked down at the silent figure stretched on the blankets. It was a sort of unfaithfulness to think of anything else now, and he perceived it.

When kind hands lifted the weight of her father from her knees, she was numb with the cramping position, and sick with an indefinable loathing and despair. She tottered unsteadily on her feet, and Reeves took her in his arms and helped her into the house. Mrs. Graham, with an infinite

compassion on her beautiful, matronly face, received her on her bosom. Strong as she was, she had nearly reached the limit of her strength.

The sun came up next morning on a cool, sweet landscape, but night and morning were alike to Jason Edwards, lying there on the bed charity had extended to him. The sky was cloudless. A gentle wind stirred from the infinite fresh spaces of the west; under the window in the wet and tangled sunflowers crickets and cicadas were singing.

Sitting by his side, Reeves felt again the force of Nature's forgetfulness of man. She neither loves nor hates. Her storms have no regard for life. Her smiling calms do not recognize death. Sometimes her storms coincide with death, sometimes her calms run parallel to men's desires. She knows not, and cares nothing.

VII.

BOOMTOWN was full of teams the next morning by ten o'clock. Men from the South and North and East and West hitched up and drove into town to compare notes and see how matters stood. The Wamburger grocery was full of brown and grizzled farmers, swearing or laughing, according to their temperaments. Judge Balser's office was also full of men who had come in to get appraisements on the damage to their crops, the judge being an agent of an insurance company.

Out by Larson's blacksmith shop, on Sheridan Avenue, there was a crowd of men pitching "quates". Elliott was there, and Frank Graham, and Tonguey Thompson, who usually acted as judge of the game, and Hank Whiting, and two or three more, including Larson, the black-

smith, who hammered but fitfully on his anvil, the game being so exciting.

The game was proceeding. For quoits, they used horse-shoes, and for pegs, teeth from an old harrow. Elliott was stripped to his shirt, and his shirt was open at the neck, and so far as could be discovered, he had no thought save to win the game and get the treat on the other fellow.

"How's Edwards this mornin'?" two or three inquired, as Frank joined them.

Johnson came along the street with a sickle on his shoulder, and after watching the game a moment, left the sickle inside the shop and went up to his old antagonist, Ruble, who was seated on a soap-box at the corner of the shop. Johnson was in a bad mood. He gave Ruble a blow on the back that nearly knocked him down.

"Ain't yeh got nothin' to do but this?"

"No, I hain't," said Ruble, in rising rage.

"Well, yeh might pray f'r a wind to h'ist the grain. Some fields look as if a herd of elephunts had summered into 'em."

Elliott and Frank Graham were having a scuffle, and the crowd was laughing

so heartily that Johnson was forced to raise his voice. The judge stood placidly smoking.

"Old Jason Edwards' grain is worse 'n mine—jest pounded clean out o' sight an' sound. Yeh couldn't raise it with Gabriel's trumpet."

"Can't lay this to the administration, or taxation or anything, can yeh?"

"I'll bet I can. If we hadn't give away s' much land to the railroad an' let land-sharks gobble it up, an' if we'd taxed 'em as we ought to, we wouldn't be crowded way out here where it can't rain without blowing hard enough to tear the ears off a cast-iron bull-dog"—

"At it again," said Frank, pointing at Johnson, who was gesticulating violently.

"Why don't you old seeds quit quarrelin' an' go to fightin'?"

"I'm goin' to git out o' this God-forsaken country," said Johnson, bitterly, going off up the street.

"Oh, no, you won't," laughed Frank. "You'll be braggin' about the climate in less 'n two days—I know yeh."

Reeves was studying them, and thinking of the difference between their laughter and apparent freedom from care, and the question of life and death which was being worked out in the silent room he had just left.

"How'd you leave him?" asked Frank, coming over to Reeves.

"Not much change—doctor don't seem to know what to do. If he don't change for the better soon, I shall telegraph to St. Paul for a physician. By the way, this scene is a study to me. I can't realize that the land was swept last night by a terrible storm, to see these fellows out here, cheerful as crickets. So goes the world—comedy and tragedy side by side."

"Oh, they'd take anything so—I mean these fellers. They's always a set of these lahees, myself included, who'd laugh if their mother-in-law died."

Reeves looked out on the glorious landscape, retaining still much of its morning freshness—the sky just specked with bits of impalpable white vapor.

"Your climate is so sinister in its beauty,

so delusive, I can't realize what has been done. The horror of last night is like an exaggeration of a dream. There is no receding swell this morning, as there would be on the ocean, to hint of the storm just passed."

"I guess Alice Edwards ain't likely to forget it right away."

Reeves turned and put his hand on Frank's shoulder—

"It's due to you that they have a quiet room and careful"—

"Oh, drop that! that's nothin'."

"I guess the old man's work is about done," said Reeves, after a pause, during which Elliott led the crowd into the Oatbin saloon.

"It isn't the thing to be altogether sorry for, either. I don't suppose he ever knew freedom from care—few of us do. Our whole infernal civilization is a struggle. We are like hunters climbing a perpendicular cliff, a bottomless gulf below, clinging wildly to tiny roots and crevices, and toiling upward, eyes fixed on the green and alluring slopes above. We strain and

strive, now slipping, now gaining, while our hair whitens with the agony of our aching, failing muscles. One by one we give up and fall with curse or groan, but the others keep on, not daring to look down. There is no rest from the fear of fall, save in the black depths below. Graham, the most of us will never know what rest is. It makes me savage to think of men like Edwards toiling all their lives to die at sixty, unrewarded and unsatisfied."

Frank was powerfully moved, and his reply was as characteristic as it was full of meaning.

"Knocks an eye out of the American eagle, don't it?"

"Fine morning, after the shower," put in the judge, sauntering forward.

"Call it a shower, do you?"

"Oh, yes. A little severe, of course — grain blown down a little here and there. Every State in the Union liable to such. Damage merely nominal — wind'll lift it during the day."

"The judge has just the same tone, you see, that these reports of the prosperity of

the West have when issued by land-holders and mortgage companies," commented Frank. "They issued one last week, denying the poverty of the country; but I noticed it was signed by men who had land to rent or sell—bankers or mortgage companies."

"We've noticed that," Reeves said.

"I'll tell yeh one thing the wind won't lift, Judge, and that's the mortgage you hold on Jason Edwards and the rest of 'em."

"Gents, come in an' take somethin'," roared Elliott from the side door of the saloon.

"Don't care if I do—lemonade," said the judge, glad of the diversion.

Elliott turned his head and spoke to the bar-keeper within. "Mix one o' the judge's lemonades. Come in, Frank—to-day won't count. Come in, Mr. Reeves."

"Every day counts with me," said Frank. "If you want to shorten y'r life ten years, go ahead. Life ain't so cheap as that with me."

"Well, I must go back to the house an' see how Edwards is."

"Ain't it singular the way Mrs. Edwards goes on—sort of dazed?"

"Well, as I look at it Mrs. Edwards, like Macbeth, has supped full of horrors. I don't suppose anything could bring an outcry from her. It's terrible to me to see her go about in that numb way. Graham, I almost fear for Alice's reason. Her life out here has made terrible havoc in her girlhood."

What he would have said more was stopped by the return of the crowd, led by Elliott and the judge. Elliott was talking very earnestly.

The crowd burst into wild laughter. In the midst of it Johnson returned from up the street. His face was full of a strange emotion. He silenced them with a stern gesture—

"Say! You fellers are awful chipper—but just look there!"

They all looked where he pointed. Two men were bringing a third man down the walk, holding him lightly by the elbows. Behind them came a woman with a baby in her arms and a little one toddling at

her side. One of the men was Major Mullins, a tall and dignified man, with flowing whiskers and clear brown eyes, now sad and thoughtful.

"There goes Charley Severson," Johnson went on in the same bitter voice. "One o' the best fellers in the country, on his way to the train to go to the insane asylum—a ravin' maniac. He couldn't stand the strain. He's rich now!"

A hush fell on the crowd that was painful. Tears started to Reeves' eyes as he looked into the desolate face of the Norwegian girl. The little one at her side clung to her skirts, and avoided the eye like a young partridge. But the man was happy at last. His care was over. He was laughing and talking, his eyes roving about—he knew no one. He tugged at the major's arm, and turned toward the silent group of men—the major humored him.

"Hallo, fallars! Yo' gat mae latter? Ay gaet ten tousant dollars—ay sall mae horses—on Yimtown. Ay gat plows—ay go'n sall plows hundert tousant dollar.

Ay dam reich, yo' bait yo'! Ay go Chicago. Ay buy more horses—ay gaet money”—

“Come, Charley,” said the major, soft as velvet. “Come, it's time”—

He turned suddenly, a wild glare in his eyes.

“Who yo' baen, anyhow? Ay not go vit yo', ay bait!”

“We must go to Chicago after those horses, Charley.”

The maniac hesitated a moment.

“All right—ay go. Ay gaet more horses—ay sall 'em, make beeg money”—

With the incessant talk of money, they lured him on toward the station. Here was something which surpassed quoits in interest.

It was pitiful, tragic to see the wife and mother stand with her little ones about her, seeking her husband's eye, and finding only a swift, unrecognizing glare. The chubby little flaxen-haired baby seemed somehow to divine that it must not speak to its father, and it stood silent.

Several kind women and neighbors surrounded the wife and tried to comfort her,

but there was no comfort. She stood dumb, wordless, with blank face of infinite despair and suffering. She refused to yield her infants, shook her head slowly, and kept her eyes upon the restless man who paced up and down the board walk, pouring out disconnected accounts of imaginary investments which had made him a millionaire.

He was apparently perfectly happy. He laughed easily. His fine face was a little flushed. He walked with a grace and ease that would have been attractive, if it were not for the wildness of his eyes.

"A product of our civilization," said Reeves, as the train drew up, and the man was coaxed and pushed into it.

"Sharley!" wailed the woman, speaking for the first time. He turned at her voice, but did not know her. She extended the baby toward him, as if hoping that might reach him. "Sharley!"

The man laughed and went on, and the train rolled away.

"What is civilization with all its glory and grandeur of invention worth to that

woman?" asked Reeves, when he could speak.

"Nothing," replied Frank, and they walked in silence, a terrible indignation in the constriction of their throats. There were half a dozen loafers around the blacksmith shop, pitching quoits, and the blacksmith was whistling while he hammered on Johnson's sickle.

VIII.

JASON EDWARDS could hardly be said to have awakened from that strange, baffling sleep till the second morning after the storm, though Reeves, who watched with him the first and second nights as well, said he stirred and opened his eyes twice, but apparently without seeing or realizing anything.

When the cool dawn of the second morning came, Reeves, weary with watching, went to the window and gazed afar out on the beautiful plain. He could hear the clanging of the engine-bells further down town, and the clatter of 'busses as they took early passengers down to the St. Paul train. The air was marvelously clear, and the sky was cloudless, save the bands of smoke from engines or chimneys. It was only by an effort, or

by a glance at the old man lying deathly still, that he could persuade himself of the reality of that storm.

He was still standing there, thinking it all over for the twentieth time, when Frank Graham came in, and motioned to him to come out into the sitting-room adjoining.

"Now, I'll stay here while you go out and catch a snack. I'll give you a pointer—go to the restaurant at the corner down this street and get a cup of coffee to kind o' keep you steady, and I'll have breakfast ready by six-thirty. But—don't let anyone hear us—my wife ain't just up on coffee—see? And they *are* down there. The walk'll do you good. Then come back, eat a beefsteak and go to bed."

Reeves was glad to get out into the inexpressibly sweet and peaceful morning. To look up at the sky which no storm can permanently impress, and hear the cheerful voices of nature's never-complaining children, after a night of gloomy philosophizing, was sweet as sleep.

Frank, left alone, peeped in at the silent

figure, drew a morning paper from his pocket, and sank into one of the gaily upholstered chairs. The room was cheerful in a determined sort of way. A chromo or two on the wall, bright-colored carpet, organ of an ambitious pattern, centre-table supporting the family Bible, and a basket of stereopticon views on a bright-colored tidy. It was prosperous and American in its entire appearance. Frank took a pride in it from the fact that his wife did the planning mainly.

He looked up at hearing the door open, and Alice, pale but resolute and self-contained, entered.

"Good morning, Mr. Graham. Did you—is he still—sleeping?"

"He's layin' there perfectly still, and seems to be—comfortable."

Alice went into the bedroom and bent above her father's bed, and kissed him softly on the hair.

"Did you see the doctor when he was here last night?" she asked, returning and closing the door. "What did he say?"

"Not much of anything; pinched his

chin and looked wise. I take it he's in no present danger. Sort of nervous prostration—very fashionable just now."

"When did Walter go away?"

"Just now."

"Why, he promised to call you and be relieved at midnight."

"Well, he didn't—he stayed here all night. Just gone out to catch a cup o' coffee. Be back soon."

Alice was going back into the other room, as she stopped and said, "Did he look tired?"

"Well, yes—he looked ugly as a bear with a sore ear in fly-time. Now, let me advise you," he said, rising, significantly. "Whatever plan he makes, you carry out—see?"

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say," said Frank, mysteriously, as he went out.

Alice was busied, moving about with a cloth and brush, silently removing the disorder of the night, when Reeves re-entered, and stood looking at her for a little time.

She was so wifely in her whole air, so

sweet and strong, his heart went out to her as never before, and yet, because she was strong and sweet, he knew how difficult it would be to bring her to accept his plans.

She turned and saw him, and her face lighted into a sort of sad smile that did not reach the lips, but she came into the little parlor and closed the door. "Oh, Walter, how good—how generous you are!"

"Nothing of the kind, I assure you," answered Reeves, as he seized her outstretched hand. "I'm selfish as a lover. We're all egoists at bottom, even in our sacrifices—I'm no exception."

"Do you think he will live?" she cried eagerly, ignoring his deeper meaning.

"I do."

"Oh, what a load that lifts from my heart! I've found out how you obey my orders. Oh, what a dreadful two days this has been!"

"What a dreadful four years this has been!" Reeves replied, meaningly.

"What would we have done without you?" she said, and her voice quivered.

"What will I do without my girl?"

Alice—my sweetheart! Are you satisfied? Will you give up the struggle?" He drew her to him, but she remained with eyes downcast in thought. He went on tenderly—

"It has been a hopeless struggle from the first. I offer help and a home—you are helpless and homeless. Will you refuse it again?"

"My first duty is to my parents," said Alice evasively, still undecided. "Think of the unutterable tragedy of their lives!"

"Don't evade me," he persisted firmly. "You sha'n't evade me. Will you take my help and my home? Don't look away—look at me! Are you ready to come to me—you and yours?"

Alice stood for a moment silent, her pride and resolution giving way. She turned to him—

"If I am worth so much."

"So much! You're worth acres of diamonds!" he caught her face between his hands and kissed it.

She smiled a little—"You say so now."

"And I say so ever," he went on in

triumphant strain. "Now let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide-arched empire—what's the rest of it? Ah, Alice, what a tragedy had been had I married one of those other Boston girls during these years."

"I was afraid you would," she said smiling a little. "I couldn't blame you—I had no claim on you."

Reeves gave a profound and expressive sigh. "All that saved me was the traditional constitution of the masculine heart. The more I couldn't get you the more I wanted you—it's the way."

"According to that reasoning, I've done wrong to promise anything now."

"That's a 'non sequitor'," he replied quickly. "You're mine now."

"Yes—but"—

"But me no buts—I won't stand it!"

"But father is so inflexible; he hates charity so, he may not consent."

"Trust the whole matter to me. I'll come in here as a sort of special providence—nothing flatters a man more than to be a sort of lieutenant to God. I've

been waiting for the chance for years." He softened, as he thought of it. "Ah, Alice, what happy years we've wasted, just on account of his pride and your willfulness."

"It was not willfulness—it was"—

"I'll retract—I'll retract!" he cried hastily. "It was heroism, only—forget it now. Let the hand of labor swell and the weary head bow—let the wind lay hard on the icy plain, and the hail of summer trample the wheat—let the rush of trade go on in its granite grooves—you are out of the press. My dearest, my life's work is to keep you safe from sorrow."

Alice was sad again. Her eyes were deeply thoughtful, the rising sun moving to the southward threw a square of light upon her head, bringing out the grave, strong lines of her face. When she spoke, she stood for the modern woman who wishes to do, whose individuality is too high to enable her to tamely submit to social limitation.

"I *am* out of the press, but not by my own merits." He started to speak—

“Hush! You know what I mean. I hate charity, and after all, I’m saved by a sort of charity. I’ll try to be patient, but the problem is not solved for us—it’s only put off.”

IX.

THEY were all looking down at him when Jason Edwards opened his eyes, clear and quiet. Alice and her mother fell on their knees beside the bed in a transport of relief. Reeves stood looking at them all. Linnie alone was wanting to make up the group. She, silenced by Reeves' finger, stood in the door poised, waiting.

Edwards moved his lips painfully before speaking in a husky, monotonous tone—"Is the storm passed off?"

"All quiet and beautiful, Jason."

He looked around, put one hand feebly up to Alice's face—"Where's my baby?"

"Here I be, poppa," cried Linnie, bounding forward, and almost leaping upon the bed, where she snuggled down beside him. His eyes rested on Reeves again.

"How d' do, Mr. Reeves? I didn't know

yeh." He was puzzled at the room. "This ain't Boston?"

"This is Frank Graham's house," replied Alice. Edwards seemed now to recollect, and his face darkened.

"Then our house was blowed down?"

"Yes, father—the shed was carried away and all the windows broken."

"An' the wheat cut to pieces?"

"Yes, Jason—worse 'n you can think."

His face grew bitter, and after a long pause, he said, "Then I may jest as well die. It ain't no use—I can't never git up with all them mortgages"—

"Oh, Jason, Jason!" pleaded his wife.

"Have courage for our sakes, father," said Alice.

"I'd only be a burden to you instead of a blessin'," the steady voice went on. "I'm old—old! So old I don't feel like m'self—an' it was all tramped down?" he said to Reeves, with a rising reflection.

"All destroyed. The center of the storm"—

"Of course," broke in the despairing, infinitely-bitter voice. "God and man has

joined hands to break me down." He went on after a pause, speaking in a slow monotone. "They drove me out o' Derry, an' they drove me out o' Boston, an' they'll drive me out o' here. They ain't but one place left—jest one little spot—made an' pervided f'r such as me—an' that's the grave. An' they'd crowd me out o' that if they could—but they can't. They ain't no landlords in the grave."

All were weeping, Alice was stroking his hair, Linnie sobbing by his side. Mrs. Edwards rose hastily.

"I'll go an' get yeh some tea, Jason—that'll hearten you up some." As she went out, Alice said—

"Linnie, run and get an extra pillow to prop him up. I'll get some water." As they went out, Edwards said, "I guess I'll try to set up."

Reeves stepped forward to assist him, when he was stopped by the look of fear and horror on the old man's face. He was looking down toward his feet, and had the appearance of a man struggling to extricate himself from a trap.

"My God!" he whispered hoarsely, as the truth came to him. "I can't move my feet—I'm paralyzed!"

"No, no! Not that! It's only temporary—it's caused by lying still"—

The old sufferer silenced him with a look—the women were returning—"Don't tell them," he commanded, and fell back upon his pillow.

This terrible visitation, seemingly so mysterious and malignant, was very natural and might have been inferred. A small blood vessel had been ruptured in the brain, and a clot had formed, resting upon that part of the brain controlling the feet. It might be finally absorbed—it might extend until it affected the whole of one side of the body. The whole out-come was problematical.

Reeves could have wept every time he met the eyes of the old man, as the women moved about him. He seemed to be afraid that they would find out this last great blow. He said little, and at last grew drowsy and slept. Reeves was also thinking, and as he went with Frank for a spin

in the open air, he could not shake off the feeling that he had been in the presence of a typical American tragedy—the collapse of a working man.

The common fate of the majority of American farmers and mechanics—dying before their time. Going to pieces at forty, fifty or sixty years of age, from under-pay and over-work. “Yes, Edwards is a type,” he concluded with Graham.

The next day, as Jason was sitting in his easy chair, with Linnie by his side, and Alice moving about the room, Reeves entered. The old toiler, a mere hulk of his once magnificent manhood, looked at him steadily and unsmilingly, and said slowly, as Reeves came to his side and stood silently waiting—

“You’ve been a good friend to us all, young man—you’ve been patient—you’ll never git y’r pay f’r it.”

Reeves put out his arm and stopped Alice, as she was passing.

“Yes, I will—here.”

“I don’t like to pay yeh that way,” said Edwards, steadily.

"Why not?"

"Because it ain't right—I don't like to pay my debts that way—I don't like to sell my girl so cheap."

"Father!" exclaimed Alice.

Reeves checked her. "I understand him—it is cheap."

"It hurts me, but it's got to be done," the father went on. "I've got through. If I could jest kind o' crawl back to the old town where I could see a green hill once more, an' hear the sound o' the river, I'd kind o' die easier some way."

"Listen to me a moment," broke in Reeves eagerly. "I'm going to take things into my own hands now. I'm going to take you all to the East. I've got an empty house standing back there, and from this time forward, my home is your home. You needn't worry about your future—only enjoy"—

Edwards stopped him with a gesture. He was broken, but not subdued. The pride rose in him yet—the pride of an American who will never surrender his freedom while he lives.

"Hold on, young man! I'm sixty years of age. For fifty years I've traveled, an' I've always paid my way, up to this day. I've earned every dollar I ever had with these hands"—he held up his trembling, crooked fingers. "I never was beholden to any man for a meal o' vittles, an' I wouldn't be now, if I was alone."

He lay silent for a moment, his face working, the tears running down his wrinkled face.

"I'm a failure—but don't talk to me of enjoyin'—a pauper!"

Alice leaped up. "You're not a pauper!"

"He's a hero!" exclaimed Reeves, with kindling eyes. "He has fought heroically. No battle can test the courage of a man so much as this endless struggle against the injustice of the world—this silent, ceaseless war against hunger and cold." He bent over Jason now, and his voice was indescribably winning. "I understand. I know how hard it is for a brave man to go to the rear. I've heard my father say that men used to tie up their own wounds and fight on, streaming with blood, rather than

be taken to the rear, and that when at last they fell and the column passed on, they'd wave their bandaged arms and shout, waving their comrades into the cannon-smoke. Now to me, you're a soldier fighting a greater and fiercer battle than the Wilderness—a battle as wide as the world, in which women and children fight and die. You are old and disabled—let me carry you to the rear. Let me take you back to Derry."

"Yes, father," pleaded Alice, "my courage is gone—I can't fight alone."

Edwards tried twice before he spoke. "I surrender. I'm beat." Alice flung her arms about his neck.

"For your sakes I give up," he went on; "but it hurts—it hurts. I'm like an old broken scythe ready to be hung up to rust in the rain. I ain't any use to you now, Jennie. Young man, here's my hand. Take her back to Boston, where she belongs, and take me back to Derry, if I'm worth so much, an' let me die there. That's all I ask for myself—it ain't much—I can't die out here on this prairie, with

no trees to be buried under. I feel 's if I couldn't rest there—and rest is the sweetest thing in the world for a man like me. I can't afford to lose that."

Reeves stood up, his face beamed. "You are doing me the favor," and he quoted from Shelley—

"The world is weary of the past,
The day of justice blooms at last."

But Edwards, with the mist of coming night in his eyes and the numbness of death in his limbs, could not thrill to the young man's enthusiasm. He could only try to be patient and wait for death calmly. Life had brought him nothing—death had no terror.

* * * * *

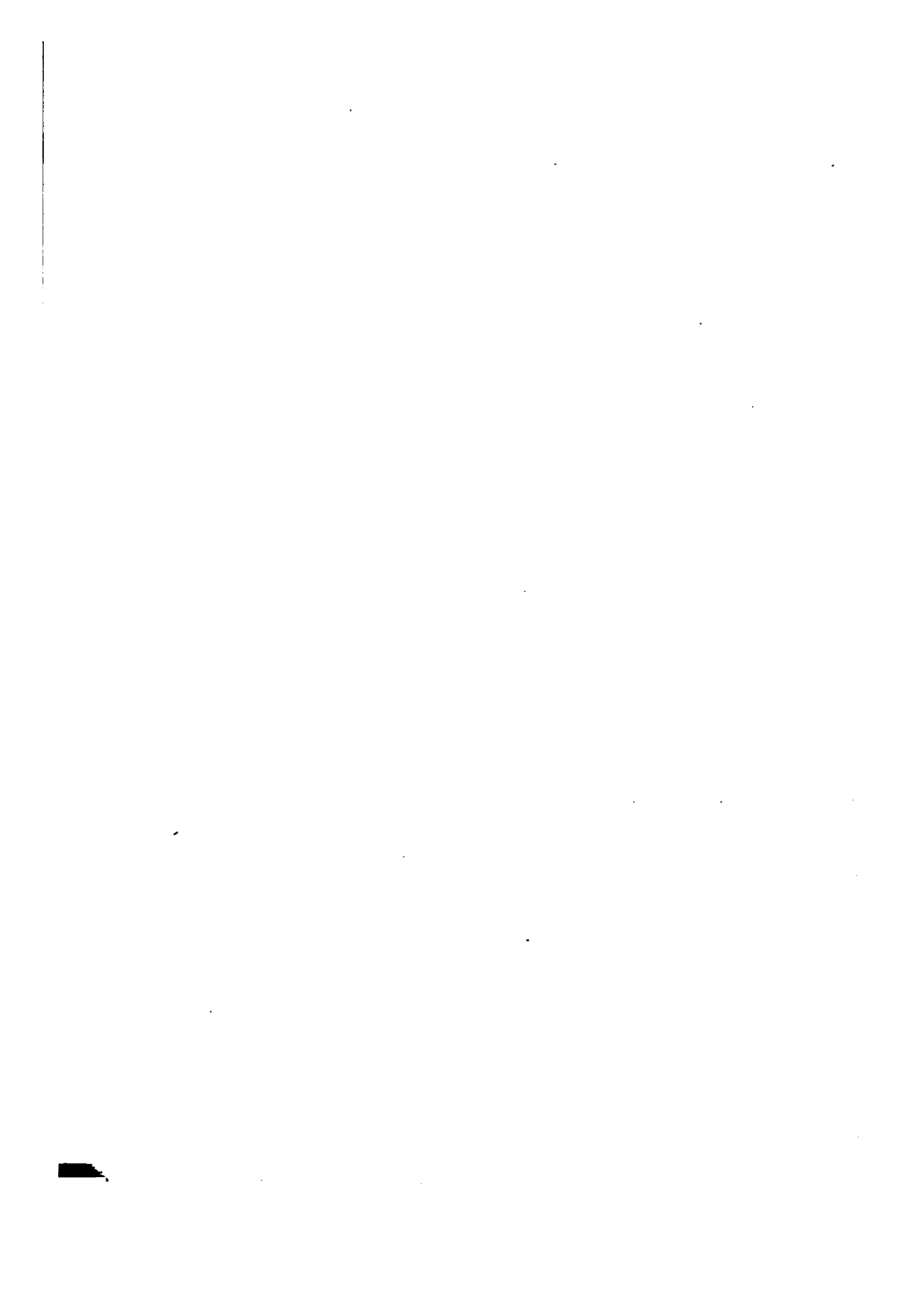
When they entered Massachusetts soil, Jason roused up and asked to be propped up so that he could look out. The train was rushing along a brawling stream between rocky, rounded, wooded hills. The landscape was as fresh as June with recent rains, but here and there, amid the

the greens, was a dash of color that showed the ripeness of August. The distant hills stood purple-blue against the red of the morning sky. The still pools were starred with lilies, and in their clear, still nooks reflected the sky and wood with marvelous clearness.

"How do you feel this morning?" asked Reeves cheerily.

Edwards looked across the aisle of the beautiful car, the sun was streaming across the heads of his daughters. He did not feel strong enough to speak, but he smiled.

THE END.



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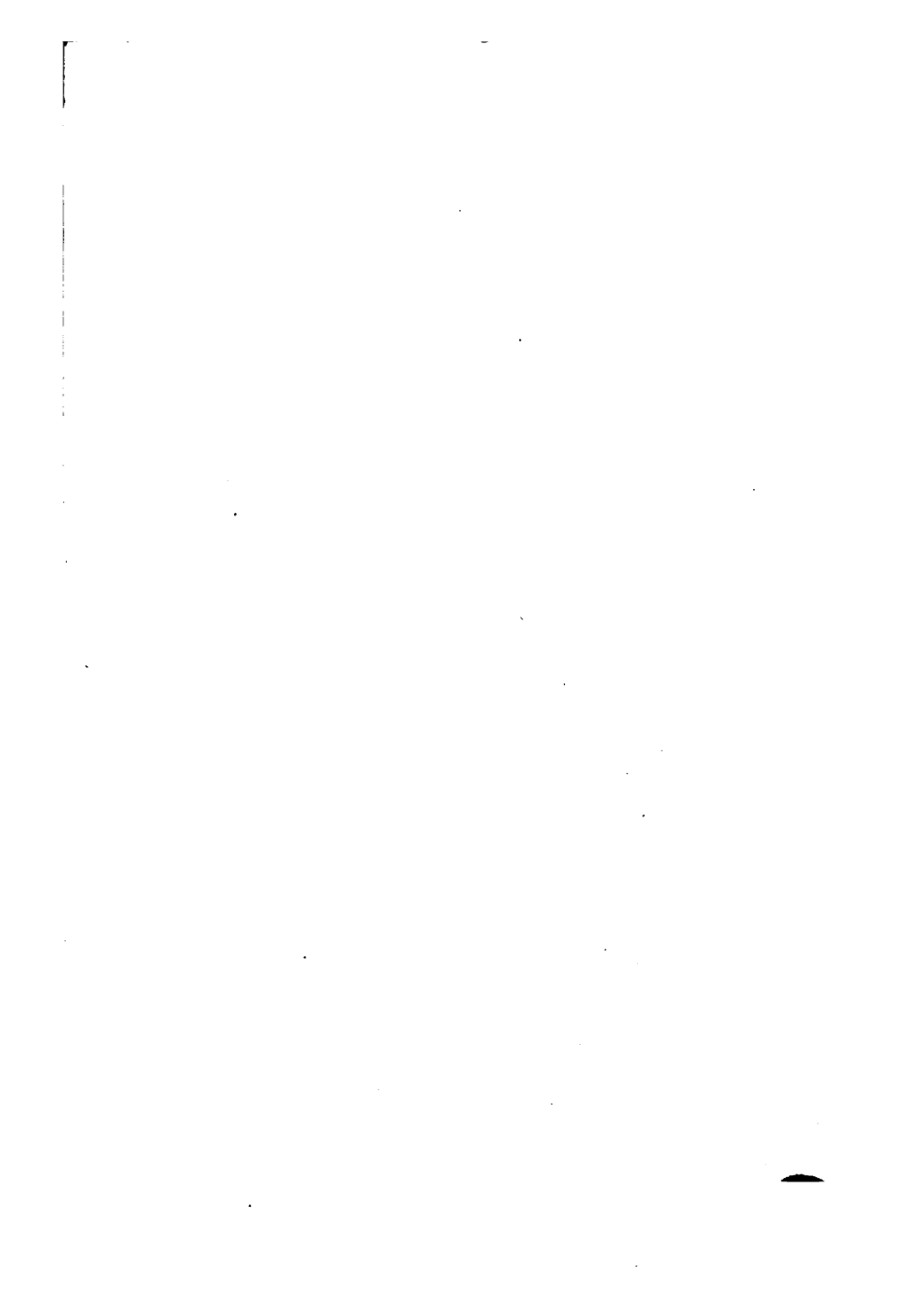
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